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A LONDON LEGEND

BY

JUSTIN HUNTLY MCCARTHY

AUTHOR OF 'DOOM,' 'DOLLY,' 'LILY LASS,' ETC.

'Coincidence, coincidence, divine coincidence! Let us at least cling to it in legend if we lack it plentifully in life. Let us remember that if romance is a mirror it is sometimes a magic mirror, and the sights that we see therein are governed, not by the weary laws of a workaday world, but by the wonders of an Arabian tale.'

THE LETTERS OF PERTINAX.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

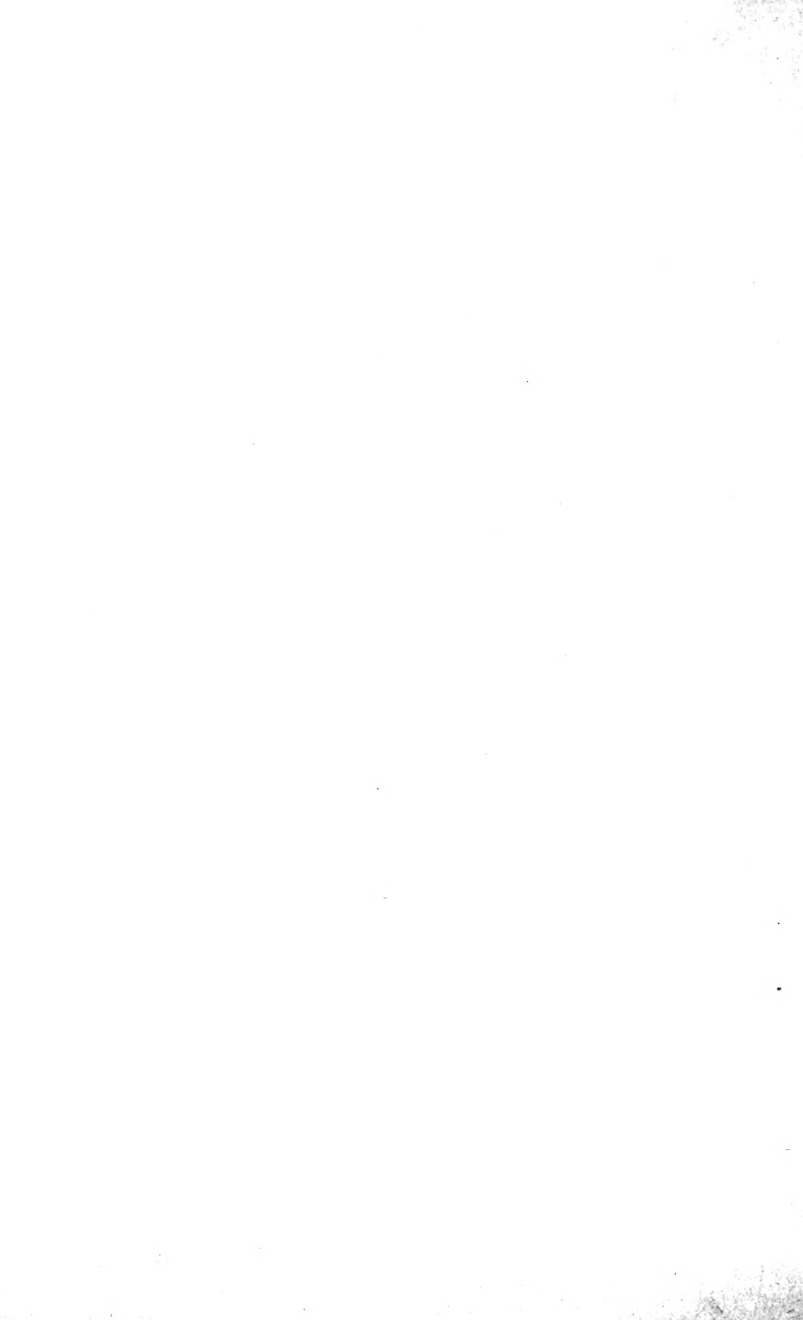
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A LONDON LEGEND

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLEASURES OF FRIENDSHIP.

They swore to be friends for ever,
Eternally hand and glove :
They thought themselves mightily clever—
And then they fell in love.

A Pastoral in Pink.

THOSE who have read the ‘Letters of Per-
tinax’ will remember how that philosopher
and cynic defines friendship between man
and woman as the first chapter of a folly or
the last chapter of a lament. But cynics are
not always in the right of it, and Swift, who
was no cynic, had always cherished some

very fine ideas about friendship, which he had plumped with many other ideas into his 'Cry for Liberty.' He had even gone so far as to cite with approval the theory of the young St. Just, who was one of his heroes, and whose portrait adorned the walls of the Cordeliers' Club, that it would be well for the State to formally abolish love and set up friendship in its stead. He had enlarged upon the advantages of friendship between men and women with the more impartiality that he had never made the experiment. He had known loves, or what passed for loves, and of course he counted some women—and chiefly Lucilla—among his few friends, but that was not exactly what he had meant when he propounded his theory. Now it seemed as if Fate was according to him what it does not always accord to philosophers, the opportunity of putting his theory into practice.

Some friendships grow little, if at all—remain at the last in the same cool atmo-

sphere as at first ; such friendship is scarcely friendship, it is but a formalized indifference. Some friendships grow very slowly, if very surely, marking a steady if almost imperceptible progress with the course of the seasons, yet so gradually that it is only when near the end of the journey that the look-back shows the extent of the ground that has been gone over. But some friendships, and these are the best and the sweetest, ripen swiftly ; the blossom succeeds to the bud, and the fruit to the blossom, with a tropical rapidity that is full of delight to people of high passions and warm pulses. To-day such destined spirits meet, salute, exchange some subtle glances, that are half-conscious pledges ; to-morrow they are full of self-confessions to each other and well on the highway to sworn comradeship ; the day after they are old friends and friends for life. There have been cases in which a man and a woman, swung together by the whirligig of Time, have found themselves at the end of an

exquisite week bound together by an intimacy that seems to have lasted for years, an intimacy that makes each wonder, in the words of the gracious poet, 'what you and I did ere we met.'

Even such a friendship, so warm, so quick, so glad, was the friendship between Swift and Candida. If the week that had passed between his first meeting with her and his second had seemed intolerably long, the week that passed after the second meeting, if it seemed to fly with the swiftness of the Arabian Bird, seemed also, like the dream of the Arabian king, to hold the course of long years shut up within a little space.

'With some folk,' says Pertinax, 'friendship is a river that widens slowly and surely from its source to the sea. With others it is a village brook that answers to every external influence, to the breath of every breeze, the passing of every cloud, that glitters in the sunshine and shivers in the rain, and is the first to freeze in winter.

With others, again, 'tis like a mountain tarn, darkly deep, silent, unconscious. Yet again, with others 'tis like some mighty flood that sweeps over every obstacle and covers a ruined country with a great sheet of water like a sea, but which in time subsides and leaves desolation as the only trace of its passage. With others, again, and these perhaps the happiest, it is like to some volcanic lake : yesterday it was not, to-day it is ; it comes in one mighty moment, swift and irresistible as the flood, but, unlike the flood, it comes to stay.'

If Swift had read the 'Letters of Pertinax,' he would have accepted the latter parable as symbolic of his state. His friendship for Candida—in the core of his heart he called it his love for Candida—had altered the world for him, and had altered it for good. If he got to know Candida better in the days that drifted by, the days that made their friendship dearer to him did not seem to make it older. He felt that they were old friends on the day

when she kept her tryst with him by the pillar of the Ephesian Eros, the day when he first learned what her name was and learned where she lived.

‘Do not think me presuming,’ Swift had pleaded on that fair first day, ‘if I ask to be allowed to walk with you as far as your home.’

‘It is not much to grant,’ said Candida, ‘for I live quite close at hand. Come, by all means.’

They walked again through the long galleries and out of the Museum into the bright April sunshine. Such talk as they had on the way had turned again upon the objects around them ; they even talked as if they feared a reaction of silence after so much confidence. Candida was right when she said that she had not far to go. After they left the gates they crossed Great Russell Street and entered Bury Street. Here, at the doorway of one of the sets of flats in that street, Candida stopped.

‘These are my diggings,’ she said. ‘Here independent poverty has found her nest.’

‘We are almost neighbours,’ Swift said, ‘for I live over yonder in Queen Square.’

‘A dear old place!’ said the girl. ‘I know it well. Till to-morrow, good-bye, neighbour.’

She held out her hand; Swift took it for a moment. In another moment she had entered the doorway and disappeared from his sight, but he heard the quick sound of her feet as they ran up the stone steps. He stood still for a moment, then he turned and walked away with a head humming with delicious exaltation. He felt as if he were the king of all the world because he had found a friend in a beautiful, audacious woman.

Under the spell of this sweet unreason he could not rest, could not settle down to the solemnities of study, could not surrender himself to stupefaction in the dust of Homeric commentary. So he walked over

to the Windovers, and found Lucilla and Anthony peacefully at luncheon, and they made him welcome and gave him food and drink, and he ate and drank joyously enough, for his honest appetite did not strike its flag even to a high passion.

Windover had not yet made up his mind about the Pine Hill election. In fact, it seemed that there was no need for an immediate decision. The sitting member had not yet sent in his application for the Chiltern Hundreds, had not yet, it seemed, definitely decided to do so. It depended a good deal upon some consultation of doctors who should definitely pronounce upon the state of his health. So much Windover had learned in a letter from Rockielaw, and he seemed rather pleased than pained at a delay which postponed the necessity for a momentous decision. He had also received a letter from Gabriel Oldacre, from Constantinople, full of interesting news of that marvellous city and of the doings of Amber Pasha. Anthony

read the letter aloud to Swift, and as it attracted him, Anthony told him of the romance of Gabriel's life, of his love for Dorothy Perceval, who had given her love to Harry Chandos, and how in his despair he had consented to accompany Amber Pasha to Constantinople, where he had stayed ever since.

‘But I do not think that he has found consolation,’ Anthony said. ‘I do not think that he will ever get over it; he is the sort of man who takes that kind of thing badly to heart. Of course he never says a word to me of his sorrow, but I know that his very soul is sick with it. Poor devil!’

And Swift, listening, and flushed with the favour of his new fortune, felt a pity for the man he did not know, and echoed Anthony's ‘Poor devil!’ sympathetically.

Then the talk drifted backward from Constantinople to Pine Hill, and from Pine Hill to London, and from London in general to that particular portion of London which was

known by the name of St. Ethelfreda's Without.

‘Erastus Albany came to see me yesterday,’ Windover said, ‘at the office of *The Arbiter*. He has been writing an article for me on Jerome of Jerusalem, his favourite saint, and he carried his own copy. I think he was unwilling to trust the post with so precious a manuscript, but he pretended that he came because he was getting up some entertainment at Brisbane Hall, and hoped that Lucilla would sing at it. He wants his list to be as varied as possible. I offered to read some pages from my Elizabethan essays, but he declined ungratefully—said he did not think it would quite suit the occasion. I believe he wishes to make a kind of variety show of it, like a music-hall. You don’t sing any comic songs, do you, Brander?’

Swift shook his head.

‘I don’t do anything so diverting, and I am afraid a harangue upon the latest

Teutonic theory of the distribution of Homer would scarcely serve the turn. But I dare say I could find somebody or other who might be willing to take a hand.'

The thought of his friend the snake-charmer had just come into Swift's mind. He might possibly be induced to exhibit his wizardries for the entertainment of St. Ethelfreda's Without. Swift had a regard for Erastus Albany, whose Christian socialism was not wholly unacceptable to the Cordeliers, and he would always be glad to do him a service. Perhaps a certain curiosity to see Mr. Drass again entered into Swift's motive; at all events, he resolved to make the experiment.

When the meal was ended, they all three went into the garden for a time. There was a fountain in the garden, a queer old stone fountain that had been set up there by Harry Chandos. He had brought it from Italy; it was by no means unsightly; it could be made to play on occasion with

considerable expenditure of water. Now, tempted by the early warmth of the year, they turned on the little fountain and sat for awhile to watch it splashing and sparkling, while Windover smoked cigarettes and Lucilla knitted. Swift was not a smoker, though he sometimes smoked a pipe with Budget. In his boyhood he thought that it was un-Hellenic ; the Greeks were unaware of tobacco ; the pleasures that pleased Mimermus might suffice for Brander Swift. In his later days he seemed to fancy that it did not accord with the principles of Eighty-nine and the politics of St. Just. The real fact was that he did not care about smoking.

After awhile, when Swift guessed that Windover would wish to get to his desk, he got up and said good-bye to the garden and the fountain, and the boy and the girl who were his host and hostess. He left the house as he always left it, with a not ungenerous envy of its calm and its content. At former times he had asked himself whether, after

all, there might not be other things in life besides translating German scholars and haranguing the Cordeliers. And after asking, he had generally dismissed the question and gone back to his Cordeliers and gone back to his German scholars. But now he put to himself the same question and gave himself a very different answer than acquiescence. There were other things in life than German scholarship and Cordeliers' controversies; there were better things—there were beauty and love, and a girl called Candida. And he repeated the name Candida over and over again as he went his way, and seemed to find it sweeter with every repetition.

He had left the Windovers with the determination to try and find Mr. Drass's house, and if possible Mr. Drass. He had no great difficulty in tracking his way to the dingy unlovely crescent in which the dingy unlovely house stood. When he had quitted it on that eventful evening he had taken

note of its bearings as he steered his way through the darkness to the Windovers, and now he found that his memory served him well and carried him without much fault through the dreary streets. There is a grisly monotony about Camden Town which throws its especial difficulty in the way of the explorer, but Swift had a fair sense of locality, and in time he reached the dingy crescent and faced the dingy house. It looked strangely dead in the daylight, for every window was shuttered from basement to garret, and the playfulness of the nomad youth of the neighbourhood had asserted itself by breaking all the panes of glass that stone, propelled by hand or sling, could reach. The forlorn area, a receptacle, as it would seem, for the general rubbish of the region, was fringed with a frieze of rusty railings whose rusty gateway was securely locked. Hardly a trace of paint remained on the dismal door. If it ever had a knocker, the knocker had been wrenched away long

before, and time and weather had effaced even the marks that showed where it had been affixed. There was a hole at the side for a bell-pull, a hole like a wound, but there was no bell-handle, and though there was a bell-handle rocking on the area railing, it rocked aimlessly, for it had no chain. The keyhole in the door seemed to be stopped, as if to deny wandering curiosity even so slight, so peccant a glimpse of the silence, of the secrecy beyond. The dirty pillars of the absurd porch, those pillars of that porch which had sheltered Swift a week earlier, had flaked their stucco away in ragged seams through which the fallacious brickwork grinned ghastly at the exposure of its cheat. It seemed to Swift that he had seldom seen so wretched a sight, and he likened it to the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Was it possible that such a sordid, abandoned exterior was the shell for such fantastic splendour and such strange inmates?

He ascended the crumbling steps, stood in the porch and surveyed the door, wondering in what way to effect communication with the occupant if the occupant were within. Without a knocker and without a bell the thing was a problem. He listened half fearfully, expecting to hear soft creeping sounds behind the partition, sounds of the sinuous movements of great snakes. But he heard nothing. All was still, all was silent. The outer air of deadness which the house wore seemed to be balanced by an inner deadness no less repellent. There was an ugly sense of something like enchantment about the place which forced upon Swift an odd boyish temptation to take to his heels and run away as children run from things uncanny. But he had come to see Mr. Drass, and he meant to see him if he could, so after a few moments of hesitation he drummed sharply on the panels of the door with the knob of his stick. The sounds seemed to reverberate drearily through empty echoing spaces and die away

into silence. They brought no response, so he tapped again and again, yet with no greater success. But the peculiar method of his knocking arrested the attention of idle passers-by, and collected a little crowd of staring children from adjacent gutters, who eyed him curiously, taking him for a madman or a baffled tax-collector. Some of them, regarding the whole thing as an unwonted and welcome entertainment, adjured Swift to try again, and seemed vastly delighted when Swift repeated his blows and gained nothing but noise by so doing. Then a slatternly woman came out into the neighbouring area and looked up sourly at Swift, and told him that it wasn't a bit of good his standing knocking there all day, as there was nobody in the house, and hadn't been for days and days. Swift asked her civilly if she could tell him when Mr. Drass would be back ; to which the woman answered that she knew nothing about him, and had no cause to, thank heaven ! and that it was none of her business

to poke her nose into her neighbours' affairs. So Swift, finding that there was nothing to learn or gain by waiting any longer, came down the steps again and pushed his way through the little crowd that seemed reluctant to let him depart so soon, and resentful of the curtailment of their amusement. A little farther on in the crescent Swift came upon a policeman lounging along with that air of languid indifference which comes over the custodians of law and order in such sleepy neighbourhoods. He, questioned, was willing enough to talk, but he could tell Swift little. The house belonged to an old gentleman who lived mostly abroad ; it was occupied from time to time by different kinds of people who always seemed to be foreigners, but who never did anything suspicious. Often it was unoccupied for months and months at a stretch. That was all the policeman knew, and he told it to Swift while the little knot of loiterers at the door of the deserted dwelling watched the colloquy

from afar and decided in favour of the theory of the tax-gatherer or other exasperated creditor of some kind. Swift slipped a shilling into the hand of his informant and went his way. He had done his best to find Mr. Drass, and it was not his fault if the entertainment given by the Rev. Erastus Albany to the people of St. Ethelfreda's Without lacked the attraction of a snake-charmer from the Indies.

CHAPTER XII.

SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

The world appears a gallant place
To him that loves a lovely face ;
The sunlight seems to him more fair,
Touching the tresses of her hair ;
And in the candour of her eyes
He finds the earthly Paradise.

A Pastoral in Pink.

THE days danced by, a delirium, a rapture. The British Museum became to Brander Swift as the very Temple of Gnidus. In his imagination it took to itself all the attributes of beauty and sanctity from its association with Candida. While they wandered together side by side through its long galleries he was indeed in outward form actively engaged in telling his companion all that she

wanted to know—and she wanted to know much—about the antique world, about that Athens which he knew so much better than he knew London, and yet which, with a curious irony, he seemed to care for now chiefly because it had the good fortune to interest Candida Knox. He had devoted his life to the service of the Greeks in order that he might answer a few questions asked by a beautiful girl, and it did not occur to him for a moment that there was anything disproportionate between the cause and the effect.

Goethe has written in his ‘Sorrows of Werther’ that when the young man who is in love begins to consider his position, and the disposition of his time, and says to himself, ‘I will apportion my hours between business and pleasure, I will spend so much of my time with my sweetheart, and so much of my time with my occupations in life,’ then the State may have gained a good citizen, but the world has lost a good lover. Swift was no such man as the lover whom Goethe

scorned. Candida seemed, Candida was, all the world to him. He had been for long enough the willing slave of his books ; now he pitched them all to the devil, and thought only of a girl's bright eyes. The dust grew thick on the top of his German dictionaries ; the wisdom of Bonn, of Leipzig, of Leyden, lay unheeded on his table ; Cripple and Co. must needs wait for their translations. Cripple and Co. were in no particular hurry, as it happened ; the booksellers and the book-buyers of England were not actually clamouring for the wisdom of Bonn, of Leipzig and of Leyden ; but if they had been, Swift would have let them clamour, for his part. He was a kind of unconscious fatalist. Destiny had placed this unexpected delight in his way ; it was his duty to take that delight and be thankful. The world was choking with books and wisdom, but there was only one Candida.

It was lucky for Swift, while this romantic mood was upon him, that he was in a great

degree his own master. If he chose to let his work drift while he danced attendance upon a pretty girl, that was, in the main, his own affair. He was responsible to no one ; his work was bound by no fixed times or conditions ; his scholarship, like skilled artisanship, could always command employment. In his recent years of simplicity and severe work he had saved much more money than he spent, and he had in his bank a modest sum to his name, which made him now feel as independent as if he were a millionaire. Swift did not deliberately reason out his position in this way ; he simply felt that he was free, that the most beautiful woman in the world was willing to call him friend, and that to be with her was the best thing in the world, and to think of her when he was not with her the next best thing. ‘ Who knows but the world may end to-night ? ’ he might have said, with Browning’s lover, in explanation of his mood. Candida had come very suddenly into his life ; she

might vanish from his life again as suddenly. He did not care to dwell upon that possibility. In the meantime she was here, and she seemed to like him, and nothing else was worth a thought. His friends the Windovers, Budget, his books, his business, his adventure on Primrose Hill, his adventure with the snake-charmer, all these seemed to belong to an indefinable, shadowy past, that had nothing to do with the splendid sunlit present.

Through all an enchanted week he had seen her every day ; but only at the Museum, where they wandered together for hours, looking at the treasures, and talking about them or about themselves. But afterwards they met elsewhere. For on the sixth day of their strange fantastic friendship Swift asked her if he might ever come and see her.

They were standing at the time in the long Egyptian Room, where Swift had been pretending to instruct his companion in the influence of Egypt upon Greece. It had

been a poor pretence. Their talk had drifted away from Egypt, had drifted, as talk will do in the dawn of delightful friendships, to themselves and their thoughts, and experiences, and hopes, and fancies. And it was while they were both opposite to a wall-painting of Egyptian dancing girls that Swift had asked her if he might ever be allowed to come and see her.

If it was a bold request, he did not feel bold as he made it. It had become so natural, even in those few days, to see Candida daily, to walk with her, talk with her, that their friendship seemed already to have endured through the ages. And it was very much with the same feeling in which he would have asked some man whom he had met and liked if he might come and see him, that Swift asked this favour of Candida Knox. For though he was more devoted to her and her beauty with every passing day, he had kept his devotion to himself; at least, so far as saying nothing about it went. A

man often thinks that because he is silent he has not betrayed himself. Besides, Candida's divine frankness did not seem to invite utterances of devotion.

Now, when he asked her, she looked up at him for a moment. Then, as her eyes travelled back to the picture of the dancing-girls, she said 'Yes' very quietly, and was silent afterwards for a few seconds, during which Swift seemed to think that his heart-beats must sound like the booming of a bell. Then she spoke again.

'If I let you come and see me,' she said, 'it must be on one well-understood, well-observed condition. I am not conventional, and I do not see why you should not come and see me as you would come to see some man—why I should not welcome you as I should welcome some woman.'

She paused again. Swift hastened to agree with her theory—her theory, that had always been his theory.

'Of course not. We are true comrades.

We are none the less comrades because I am a man, because you are a beautiful woman.'

She turned round quickly and faced him. Perhaps the praise had called the colour into her cheeks a little, for he had not yet spoken to her of her beauty.

'That is just it,' she said. 'Let me admit, for the sake of the argument, that I really am what you are good enough to call me, a beautiful woman. Now, don't interrupt me'—for Swift was about to speak—'I know I am not ill-favoured. You will remember that I told you the other day that there was one thing I did not wish you ever to talk to me about.'

'Yes,' said Swift, 'I remember.'

'Don't think,' Candida went on, 'that I mind your letting me know that you think me beautiful, now and then, if you really do think so, and if it gives you any pleasure to let me know that you think so. I am a woman, if an unconventional woman, and I like flattery sometimes and from some

people. But it is perfectly possible that if you are pleased with my face you might fall in love with me, or think that you had fallen in love with me. At least the thing is not impossible.'

'No,' said Swift, 'the thing is not impossible.'

Even now her frankness seemed perfectly natural, perfectly right, perfectly womanly. She seemed to assume that she had the right to speak as she pleased, and she acted on the assumption with a convincing grace.

'Well,' she said, 'I want you to understand at once that I do not wish you to make love to me. We are friends, not lovers; let us remain friends. If you were to fall in love with me it would be neither my fault nor your fault; but if it should happen, don't tell me about it. If I make you my friend, it is because I prize your friendship, because I believe that friendship is possible between a man and a woman, because you believe so too.'

‘Of course,’ Swift assented, somewhat sadly. He could not deny his own theory—the theory that he exposed at length in several of the most eloquent pages of the ‘Cry for Liberty.’ But he did not feel quite as confident now in its universal application.

‘You must not think me vain if I talk like this,’ she said. ‘I do not say that you will fall in love with me. But it is possible that you might fall in love with me, as it is possible that I might fall in love with you.’

Though she spoke these words as composedly as if she were discussing some abstract question of no immediate concern to anyone, a flame seemed to pass over Swift as she spoke, and to burn out his strength, so that he trembled and felt faint. He turned to her.

‘Is that possible?’ he stammered, gazing with eager eyes upon her beautiful composed face.

‘Why not?’ she answered calmly. ‘The one thing is as possible as the other, But I don’t want either to happen—at least, for the present. Perhaps I prize your friendship too highly to put it in peril. Anyhow, I am a woman, and a woman is privileged to offer her friendship under conditions, and these are my conditions. I will be your friend with all my heart, and there’s my hand upon it; but we must be friends, not fools. Give me your promise that you will not make love to me, either spoken or unspoken, and we shall be the best friends in the world.’

She held out her hand, but he hesitated for a moment to take it. He was in love with her, though she did not seem to know it. Should he tell her so at once, or hold his peace? She saw his hesitation.

‘I read somewhere once,’ she said with a smile, ‘that between a man and a woman friendship is better than love—better, nobler, braver.’

Swift knew very well where she might have seen such a theory, for he had formulated it himself in that terrible 'Cry for Liberty,' and had been very proud of it at the time. He did not feel quite so proud of it now, which is sometimes the way of philosophers when their theories come home to roost.

'Don't you think that you are rather hard upon me,' he asked, somewhat piteously, 'in binding me down by such a hard and fast promise as that is?'

'No,' she said slowly, 'we have only been friends for a few hours, and it ought not to be difficult for you to make such a promise now. It is quite possible that you think yourself to be in love with me at this moment. Without vanity, I should not be surprised if you thought so.'

'I don't think so,' Swift said beneath his breath, with a stress upon the verb which was to show his certainty of his state.

Candida took no notice of the interruption,

made as if she had not heard it, and went on with her homily :

‘My face pleases you, my frankness interests you—there is something unexpected about this sudden friendship which charms while it amazes you. But neither charm nor amazement makes up love, though the one is love’s herald and the other love’s pursivant. But I may soften my condition thus far. Promise not to make love to me until—until I give you permission. There, it is either your hand on that or your hand in farewell.’

He looked at her for a moment with a kind of wonder and a kind of hope. But there was no trace of sentiment in her voice and no look of sentiment in her eyes.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘I promise.’

He held out his hand, and the girl took it gladly.

‘That is good,’ she said. ‘We shall be the best friends in the world now. And now I want you to tell me some more about the

influence of Egypt upon Greece. What was the story you promised me yesterday, the story from Herodotus ?'

Swift resumed the professor with a silent sigh, plunged into Herodotus, and told the promised story. But he had his reward, for when they left the Museum Candida asked him if he would like to come in and have tea with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE WHIMSICAL.

This little room is my demesne,
I am an empress here, a queen ;
Below the great world goes its way,
From daybreak to the end of day ;
The sky above my head, you see,
Spreads me a royal canopy.

Songs of Sentiment.

CANDIDA lived in a little flat at the very top of the block of buildings in which she had pitched her tent. She liked, as she explained to Swift while they climbed up the stone stairs together, to live at a height.

‘I am a child of the mountains,’ she said, ‘not a child of the valley, and I would rather dwell in an eyrie than in a cave.’

Swift agreed with her ; he would have

agreed with anything she said just then, even if she had expressed disapproval of the opinions of Karl Marx. No stairs seemed too steep that were trod in her company, no height too hopeless to which she played the guide. It was really not so very high after all, and if Swift felt giddy, it was from delight at his good fortune, not from the narrowness or the steepness of the stairs up which he followed Candida with a beating heart.

Candida's flat was very small, but very dainty. It was just big enough for her and for the single servant she kept, and for her cat, the big blue-gray Persian whom she called Omar. She opened the door with a latch-key, and led Swift across a little hall into the little room which did duty for a drawing-room. It was separated by curtains from another smaller room which served as a dining-room.

'This is my den,' said Candida, making him free of the place with a friendly wave of

the hand. 'If you will excuse me for a moment I will go and see about tea. I am not sure that my girl is in.'

She vanished, and Swift was left alone in the little room, rapturously delighted to be there, but almost afraid to realize his fair fortune. He was her guest, he was under her roof; this was the very temple, the very shrine of divinity, and he, the passionate pilgrim, had been permitted to pass within the precincts.

He looked around him almost timidly: everything he saw added to his charm. The rooms were very simply furnished, for Candida had told him that she was poor; but their simplicity had all the grace that comes of distinction in taste, distinction in choice. Everything seemed to be in harmonious relationship to everything else. Form was related to form, colour combined with, or seemed to come from, colour. All seemed to be governed by that antique law of the fair and fit, from the curtains by the door

to the flowers in the Chinese jar by the window.

A deep niche by the window was fitted with shelves and filled with books. Swift always looked at books at any time ; naturally, now, he looked at these with a livelier curiosity. It was not a very large library ; it might not have served the turn of a scholar, but for a girl living alone it was a collection of oddly-allied companions. Swift smiled approval upon Goethe and Schiller, upon Richter and Heine. He had learned already that Candida knew German, and knew it better than he, for all his practice in the translation of dreary scholars. The smile faded a little as his glance fell upon a set of volumes of Schopenhauer's writings, but re-asserted itself as he caught sight of Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam. As his gaze travelled from shelf to shelf, the expression of his face varied a good deal—varied in shades of surprise, for the collection was mixed, bewilderingly mixed. ' Grimm's

Fairy Tales' came next to 'La Cousine Bette'; a row of Ibsen's plays in German flanked several volumes of the Elizabethan dramatists; Carlyle's 'French Revolution' followed the 'Saga of Grettir the Strong'; 'The Origin of Species' ranged with 'Virginibus Puerisque' and 'Memories and Portraits'; Hans Andersen's stories shouldered a row of Labiche's plays; Pater's 'Renaissance' stood next to Lane's 'Arabian Nights'; and Symonds' two volumes on 'The Greek Poets' shouldered 'La Reine Margot,' 'La Dame de Montsoreau,' and 'Les Quarante-Cinq.'

It certainly was a curious collection. He had been prepared to find, as he did find, Tennyson and Shakespeare, Mathew Arnold and Molière, Dante, and even Petrarch; Don Quixote—though the fact that this was in Shelton's translation did a little astonish him—and Scott, Wordsworth and Shelley, Keats and Byron. He was less prepared to find, as he did find, Ronsard and Clement Marot,

Charles D'Orleans and Villon, Rossetti and Chaucer, Walther von der Vogelweide and the Romanceiro, 'The Song of the Sword' and 'Letters to Dead Authors,' 'Poems and Ballads' and 'The Subjection of Women,' some volumes of Herbert Spencer and some volumes of Paul Verlaine, the 'Morte d'Arthur' and 'Les Fleurs du Mal.'

'What an amazing collection!' he said to himself. He wondered vaguely if it were not rather muddling to a young woman's mind to read such a queer variety of books: he was conscious that, if he approved of some of the volumes, he disapproved of others; he applauded Shelton's 'Don Quixote,' but he frowned at 'Les Fleurs du Mal.' He addressed himself again to the investigation of the shelves, but he had no further time then for his inspection, for the door opened and Candida came into the room again. She laughed as she saw that he was studying the bookcase.

'You are looking at my books,' she said.

‘They are rather a mixed lot, I fear—the harvests of a variety of moods. Of course I have not room for many books here, even if I could afford to buy them, which, of course, I cannot, and so I am glad that my poor little library may offer me as wide a choice of amusement and inspiration as is possible under the conditions.’

‘I hope you don’t read too much,’ said Swift. ‘Many of us nowadays are too much bound by the bondage of books. All wisdom is not shut within the two covers of a book. It is better to live life than to read about it.’

He felt that he was sententious, but he was shy, and shyness always drove him into dogmatism. He wished to be at his ease, wished, above all things, to be brisk if not brilliant, and yet the best he could do was to stammer out sentences that might very well have been portion and parcel of the ‘Cry for Liberty.’

Candida looked at him thoughtfully. If

the ghost of a smile haunted her lips, her dark blue eyes seemed rather sad than amused.

‘Perhaps you are right,’ she said slowly. ‘Books are not everything, though I believe there are one or two people nowadays who think and talk and write as if books were not merely the best, but the only business and blessing in the world. But it is all very well to talk of living life—all very well for you with your many interests, your ambitions, your translations from the German, your socialism. Yours, if you like, is a crowded, animated, living life.’

She spoke so seriously that Swift declined to believe that she spoke satirically. And yet her words, in their apparent eulogy, somehow seemed to make his life seem small and mean, and he who lived it a somewhat foolish loungeur.

‘It is better to live one’s own life than to dream dreams,’ he said with a sententiousness that was this time self-defensive.

‘Perhaps,’ said Candida. ‘But what is a poor girl to do, placed as I am placed? The life she can live is somewhat limited, if she is not’—she paused for a moment, and then completed her sentence—‘if she is not an adventuress.’

‘Don’t you like your life?’ Swift asked. ‘To live alone, to be free? I suppose you need not live alone if you did not choose.’

‘I certainly have got some relatives,’ said Candida with a slight smile; ‘but for the present I prefer living alone to living with them. I need not starve; I have enough to keep us going, me and my maid and my cat, and perhaps when I get tired of idleness, or feel that mistress, maid and cat need more money, I shall turn companion or governess, or take to type-writing. But in the meantime I let things drift, and I drift with them. I like to feel almost as free as if I were a man, and I think I shall be sensible enough not to get into scrapes.’

‘You will want a purpose in life,’ said

Swift. 'You will want something to do. At least, you would if you were a man.'

'I believe,' she said, 'that I have heard of men who get on with their lives without doing anything.'

'Drones, not men,' Swift answered. 'No man has a right to live an idle life.'

'Nor woman neither, I know you would add,' said Candida. 'Well, you shall not blush for me, my friend. I will find something to do, be sure of that. But remember that this life, this kind of liberty, is so new to me, and if I lounge away some hours or days or weeks, or even months, you must needs forgive me.'

Swift would have forgiven her almost anything just then, as she leaned slightly forward with her eyes fixed upon his face, and her beauty heightened by the eagerness of her manner. If she had confessed to the sins of Semiramis, or avowed an affection for poisoning in the Borgia manner, it would have seemed to him natural and almost

commendable while he was under her spell. And for a girl to plead guilty to a desire for a man's freedom was to prove her an unconscious disciple of the 'Cry for Liberty.' The desire for a man's idleness was heterodox, but no great matter.

'Indeed,' he said, 'I hope you will let me share some of your lounging hours.'

'Your time is too precious to trifle with,' she answered.

He protested eagerly.

'Not at all, not at all. Besides, the British Museum is my hunting-ground. We do but follow the chase together. If I am lucky enough to teach you anything, remember that I learn in teaching. We are all students, even the most experienced.'

'Even the wisest of us may be wiser,' said Candida. 'Perhaps; it is very likely. Well I am content for the present to lounge and learn Greek things. By-and-by, perhaps, when I am tired of my idleness, I shall take your advice as to work and the purpose of

life, and all the rest of it. In the meantime, will you have some tea ?’

The door opened, and the maid brought in tea—a little pink and yellow maid, pink-cheeked, yellow-haired, who looked as if she carried a storage of country health that could defy Bloomsbury. At her heels, making her look like a modern representation of the Goddess Freya, came the big blue-gray Persian cat that played the third part in Candida’s household. The cat came purring to Candida, who introduced it to Swift.

‘This is Omar,’ she said—‘the most beautiful cat in the world. He is named after old Khayyam, of course.’

Omar graciously permitted Swift to stroke his soft coat. The maid withdrew, darting a little shy glance of surprise at the stranger in the yellow suit. Candida gave him some tea, which seemed to him the most enchanting elixir in the world, and they talked for a little while longer—a light talk, that Candida

kept from drifting again into a serious channel.

When Swift went away a little later with Candida's promise to meet him again at the Museum on the next day, he seemed to tread on air, and he could have danced in the street if he had not remembered in time that the sight of a student in yellow skipping for joy might afford too much entertainment to the unpoetic.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE.

Now Fortune, like the phantom in the tale,
Stands and allures me with a laurel wreath,
The which she bids me bind upon my brows
And wear in honour. Shall I for this crown
Forsake my vineyards and my fruitful fields,
Woods, lawns, and waters, and my perfect peace ?

The Duke of Attica.

THE days that immediately succeeded the letter of Colonel Rockielaw were days of much mental searching on the part of the two Windovers. To enter Parliament or not to enter Parliament, that was the question. Miss Carteret's ambassador had left so little doubt upon Windover's mind that the seat was a certainty, that neither he nor Lucilla wasted any time in con-

sidering the possibility of defeat as a factor in the problem. It really seemed that if Windover chose he had only to ask and have. The question was whether he should ask and have or no. They discussed the subject at breakfast. They went for a walk in Regent's Park, and discussed it as they wandered beneath its trees and by its waters. They discussed it again at luncheon, and after luncheon, as they sat by the fire; they allowed their favourite books to lie unheeded on their laps while they again exercised their minds over the familiar course. It was characteristic of the youthfulness with which Lucilla and her husband persisted in regarding the world and its phenomena that they found a childish enjoyment in their game of speculation, and that ever and anon, when their doubts were keenest and their faces gravest, they would be both seized by a sense of the humours of the situation, and begin to laugh like children. And yet, as Windover profoundly

observed, it was no laughing matter. Upon their decision—for Windover had no idea of deciding either way without the full concurrence of his wife—much must and more might depend.

To begin with, they were very well as they were. Windover liked his work and liked his quiet life. Lucilla admired Windover's work and liked her quiet life. They were well enough off for all their modest wants ; they were very happy in each other's society and in the society of their familiar friends ; they liked the ordered independence of their existence—in fact, they were exceedingly happy, and knew that they were happy. It was this happiness, this content—a content unusual among those who live the civic life and take any share in the direction of public affairs—that they were now both mortally afraid to jeopardize. Windover, who was very conscientious in his views as to the duties of any citizen to his State, could not make up his mind whether he really should

be of greater service to his cause inside the walls of Westminster Palace than outside those walls. He could not make up his mind whether the very natural temptation to accept a gratifying offer was a response to the call of duty or the mere prompting of a personal ambition which lurks somewhere in the hearts of most men.

Lucilla, for her part, was distracted between a secret pride in seeing her husband take his place among the representatives of the nation and a secret fear that it would lessen their companionship. She had no doubt of her husband's success in Parliament; even Budget's suggestions about a possible Premiership had not seemed to her to be at all too fantastic. But ambition for her husband was fettered by tender alarms, lest the gratification of that ambition would mean also the mortification of becoming of less importance in his life.

Many days went by in these agitations and perplexities—agitations that followed

Windover to his desk and danced impish dances between him and the paper that waited to receive his opinions on passing events ; perplexities that pursued Lucilla in all her housewifely occupations, buzzing in her ears like a swarm of summer flies. At the end of several days neither husband nor wife had advanced at all nearer towards a definite decision.

‘If this uncertainty goes on much longer,’ Anthony would exclaim in simulated despair, ‘I shall grow gray.’

And Lucilla, imitating his mood, would assert that unless they settled the problem one way or the other she would grow wrinkled and old before her time. Whereupon Windover would immediately kiss her, and they would both start laughing, only to grow serious again and pucker their brows over the problem.

A new day dawned and found them still undecided. Windover racked himself between duty and inclination, argued with duty and

inclination. Duty to his cause and the inclination for practical politics which is so often the passion of the theoretical politician urged him to accept. Duty towards Lucilla and inclination for his quiet life urged him to decline. Lucilla, who was as fretted as he, would probably have come to a decision sooner if it had been left to her, though as it was not left to her she really had no definite idea what the decision would be. The one thing she feared was forcing her husband to either action against his secret wishes, and so she watched him as a sailor watches the sky for decisive weather signals. And Windover could not make up his mind.

‘If this goes on much longer,’ said Lucilla, half laughing and half crying, on one of these mornings of doubt and of deliberation, ‘I shall become quite pettish, quite peevish, quite fractious, run all the gamut that leads from nervousness at the one end of the scale to downright bad temper on the other.’

Windover looked at her in some alarm. He knew that she was joking, but there seemed to be a note of seriousness behind the jest.

‘It is very trying,’ he confessed; ‘I begin to feel rather irritable myself. Confound that fellow! I wish he had never come here to bother us. I have a great mind to——’

‘To what?’ asked Lucilla.

‘To make up my mind one way or the other,’ Windover answered, and pretended to immerse himself in the *Times*.

‘Yes, but which way?’ said Lucilla, and Windover, with a comic groan, answered:

‘There thou hast me.’

They spoke no more of the engrossing problem that morning. Windover wrote a stalwart article for his paper on the dangers of indecision in politics. ‘We want men of action, not men of speculation,’ he wrote decisively, and then smiled and sighed at his own indecision. Lucilla went into the garden,

for the day was fine. Lucilla sat on the edge of the basin of the fountain and looked over a little armful of books which she had hastily gathered from her husband's library in the hope of finding inspiration in their pages. They included Herbert Spencer's 'Sociology,' Sir Henry Taylor's 'The Statesman,' Bagehot's 'Physics and Politics,' De Lolme on the Constitution and Machiavelli's 'Il Principe.' She turned over their pages gallantly in the hope of finding out the perfect way for the possible politician, but they made her head ache after a while, so she quietly dropped them and read Hans Andersen instead, and thought of nothing but princesses and fairies and enchantments until it was time to go and look after luncheon.

During luncheon Windover and Lucilla were ostentatiously scrupulous in avoiding any reference to the subject which was harassing them. They talked of new books they wanted to read, of new plays they

wanted to see, of places they wanted to visit. No one who overheard them would have imagined that there was such a place as Westminster in the world, or, at least, that its geographical existence was a matter of the faintest moment to either the man or the woman.

When luncheon was over they both went into the garden, and Anthony smoked cigarettes, and propounded theories of art, and looked at the vines that were trailed upon the high walls, and prophesied that if this fine weather held they would soon begin to burgeon. Lucilla walked beside him, apparently absorbed in viticulture, and her three cats and her dog gambolled in the sunshine and chased each other round the fountain. It was very Arcadian and quiet, for the garden was a large one and little overlooked, and the big chestnut-trees and plane-trees served as an effective screen against the neighbours.

Suddenly the quiet was disturbed. The

dog began to bark, the cats scattered for cover in all directions, as the maid appeared through the open window-doors closely followed by a man whose tall form and soldierly bearing had been familiar in the thoughts of both Windover and Lucilla for many days. The maid disappeared, Lucilla called to the dog to be quiet, and husband and wife advanced across the garden to meet and greet the advancing Colonel Rockielaw.

Colonel Rockielaw seemed brisker, more vivacious, more like the leader of a storming party than ever. He occupied the garden in a moment, and proceeded to carry the Windovers by a bold stroke.

‘Well,’ he said, after he had taken the hands of husband and wife victoriously—‘well, I hope you have decided, and decided in the right way.’

The Windovers were silent, and their silence seemed to perturb their questioner, for he glanced from one to the other with an expression of unconcealed chagrin.

‘Come,’ he said sadly, with a touch of sternness in the sadness, the sternness of a man who is about to declare an armistice at an end, ‘you don’t mean to tell me——’

He paused ; his disappointment seemed to be too much for him. Windover felt that he must say something.

‘Well, you see,’ he began almost apologetically, ‘the fact is——’

But what the fact was Colonel Rockielaw did not give him time to say. He charged tempestuously into the middle of Windover’s attempted explanation and scattered it.

‘Sorry to interrupt you,’ he said. ‘But before you go any further let me ask you one simple question. Do you know anything of a man of the name—the absurd name—of Budget ?’

Anthony and Lucilla involuntarily glanced at each other.

‘You do,’ said the Colonel ; ‘I perceive that you do.’

‘Yes,’ said Windover ; ‘we certainly have

a friend of the name of Budget—Mr. Stephen Budget. But I do not quite see——’

‘What he has to do with this matter,’ said the Colonel. ‘Well, there I agree with you; neither do I. But Mr. Budget—yes, his name was Stephen—seems to think differently from both of us.’

‘How do you mean?’ asked Lucilla.

They had heard or seen nothing of Stephen Budget since the night when he had dined with them and been told of the proposal to Windover, but she still resented the kind of advice he had given to Windover and the way he tendered it. So she felt much curiosity to know how Colonel Rockielaw had come to hear of him.

‘Mean, my dear madam?’ said the Colonel. ‘Why, simply this: did you give this fellow Budget—excuse me, if he is a friend of yours, for calling him “this fellow”; but that is how he presents himself to my mind—did you give this person Budget any authority

to act in any way on your behalf in this matter ?

‘Certainly not,’ said both Anthony and Lucilla, speaking together with the precision and decision of a chorus.

‘I thought not,’ said Colonel Rockielaw, ‘I felt sure not. He didn’t seem to be the kind of person—excuse me again ; if he is a friend of yours he is a friend of yours, and no more words about it—but he did not really seem to me to be the kind of person whom you would authorize to act in any kind of delicate negotiations.’

‘I most certainly should not,’ said Windover. ‘And I should be glad to know how he comes into this matter at all.’

‘Certainly,’ said Colonel Rockielaw. ‘This fellow—I beg pardon, this Mr. Stephen Budget—came to me the other day, called upon me at the club. He sent up a note to me in which he asked for the favour of a few minutes’ interview. He said in his note that it concerned the election, and he

mentioned your name as a great friend of his.'

Windover frowned slightly. Lucilla frowned strongly. They both began to feel annoyed. The Colonel went on with his narrative.

'Of course the mention of your name would have been enough for me at any time, but the mention of your name coupled with the election convinced me that it must be something of the utmost importance, that the writer was probably some emissary of yours sent either to give me your answer or to ask some further questions before deciding. So I saw your friend in the Strangers' Room of the club.'

The Colonel paused for a moment as if to observe the effect of his story upon his hearers. Windover said nothing, but he looked a little pale. Lucilla leaned forward eagerly, and spurred the Colonel's speech with an interrogative, 'Well?'

'I do not wish to say anything uncompli-

mentary about anyone whom you have honoured with your friendship,' said Colonel Rockielaw hesitatingly, 'but I must say, frankly, that I was not much impressed by the man, or, rather, I should say that I was, but that my impressions were not very favourable.'

'I am not surprised,' said Lucilla rather sharply. Her latent distrust of Stephen was deepening.

The Colonel bowed gallantly to Lucilla.

'I am glad to find that we are in agreement,' he said. 'My unfavourable impressions were not removed when he proceeded to explain himself, which, to do him justice, he did without the slightest embarrassment. Indeed, he acted as if he were conferring a favour upon me by invading my club and my quiet.'

'That is very like Stephen,' said Windover with a smile, as he pictured to himself the appearance of the two men at the interview.

‘He began by explaining,’ the Colonel went on, ‘that he was a very intimate friend of yours, Mr. Windover. I notice, by the way, that you speak of him by his Christian name—Stephen.’

‘We have been friends for some time, friends of a friendship formed in journalism. Budget has a way of considering a much slighter acquaintance than ours an intimate friendship.’

‘So I should suppose,’ said the Colonel—‘so I should suppose. Well, to make a long story short, he gave me to understand, after many circumlocutions, that it was in the highest degree improbable that you could be prevailed upon to stand for Parliament.’

‘He certainly did his best to persuade me not to stand,’ said Windover; ‘but that gave him no right to act as the interpreter of my opinions to anyone.’

‘Of course not,’ Rockielaw assented. ‘However, he even went so far as to urge me, all in your interests, of course, not to

press the proposal upon you. He painted quite a moving picture, I assure you, of the injury to your literary work, of the injury to your domestic peace, that public life would cause you.'

'How very impertinent of him!' said Lucilla. Her pretty cheeks were red with anger, and her eyes shone.

'I cannot understand,' said Windover, 'why Stephen took it upon himself to arrange my public and private affairs for me in this extraordinary manner.'

'Can't you?' said the Colonel. 'You will in a minute, for the best, or the worst, of the business is still to come. I suggested to Mr. Budget that, if you thought public life would be injurious to your interests, you would no doubt be able to speak for yourself. That was my hint for him to go, but instead of taking it, he took me still further into his confidence. He was good enough to suggest that in the event, the very likely event, of your absolutely declining the offer that had

been made to you, he himself, Stephen Budget, would be quite prepared to accept the candidature and come forward as the champion of our interests.'

Lucilla gave a little gasp, half of amazement and half of triumph. She had expected some such revelation before the Colonel had made it. Windover was frankly astonished.

'Budget said this?' he asked.

'As I tell you,' said Rockielaw. 'He assured me that as the representative of our constituency he would undoubtedly be the right man in the right place.'

'But this is quite astonishing!'—a remark upon which Lucilla commented with an indignant 'Not at all!' beneath her breath. 'Stephen Budget is one of the extremest of extreme Radicals.'

'Is he?' said Colonel Rockielaw. 'Then, he is also one of the coolest of cool hands, to come to me as he did. If I had known that, I should have asked him to step outside the club and have laid my rattan across his

shoulders in the open street. Perhaps it's not too late now. Do you know the rascal's address ?'

And the Colonel jumped up in a passion, clutching his cane and with his face very red.

Lucilla half closed her eyes as she shaped to herself with a certain amusement a picture of the scuffle between the big, hard, well-knit soldier and the big, loose, flabby Budget. But Windover hastened to calm the Colonel. Windover was not a man who liked scenes of any kind, or the suggestion of scenes.

'I don't think anything would be gained by that, my dear Colonel Rockielaw. It is true that I have always taken Budget to be a very extreme politician. But I may have been mistaken ; I may have misinterpreted his views. Also he may have changed his mind. We have all heard of rapid conversions in politics. So far, at least, the age of miracles is not past. And Budget is a very clever man.'

‘He is a very great rogue, sir!’ responded the indignant Colonel. But he so far suffered himself to be mollified that he sat down again, and, placing his rattan between his knees, folded his hands over its gold head, and gazed fixedly at the Windovers. ‘The question for us to consider now,’ he said, ‘is not what this fellow Budget is, or what this fellow Budget is not. The question is, Are you disposed to accept our offer?’

And though Windover had not exchanged a word or a glance with Lucilla, he knew as well as if they had exchanged the inmost ideas of their minds that he was only saying what she would wish him to say when he returned the Colonel’s fixed gaze and answered firmly :

‘I am.’

CHAPTER XV.

THE DAWNING OF THE YEAR.

Spring is in the air, my darling,
 Spring is everywhere ;
In the chatter of the starling,
 In the golden air.
Spring is in the grove whose greenness
Thinly veils the branches' leanness—
 Branches lately bare.

Spring has come at last, my sweeting,
 Earth is mad with spring ;
Listen to the cuckoo's greeting
 Hear the swallow's wing.
Fireless hearths confound the cricket,
Nightingales in yonder thicket
 Have begun to sing.

Songs of Sentiment.

POETS have raved about spring ever since poets began to rave about anything. But the rhapsodies of English poets are too often

a mockery. Yet there are some seasons, rare and precious, when our English spring, that is too often churlish, wears a genial face—when March carries upon its rugged shoulders the golden mantle of a poet's May, and April laughs like June. So it was with this year—this year of Swift's life when all the elements seemed to be allied in the purpose of making existence an enchantment. The dear days of that April were such days as he had never remembered in April before—days of golden sunlight, of soft air, days as warm as June, days that made all the world wear holiday aspect, days of blue skies, of bursting buds, of an atmosphere vibrating with heat.

London seemed gay and gallant in the unfamiliar sunlight which gilded its dingy streets and gave a glory to its dingy houses. The parks blazed with early flowers; people who had window-boxes rejoiced in hyacinth and narcissus; the flower shops revelled in a riot of colour with prim-

roses and violets and daffodils. In the green open spaces which are London's playgrounds, the oases in her desert of bricks and flags, butterflies were now and then to be seen, yellow butterflies like animated flowers wheeling in the warm ether, unexpected harbingers of all good things, like Hesperus, and luring screaming children in pursuit, an allegory of human vanity that must for ever grasp at a fluttering happiness. It was all part of a masquerade, no doubt. London had no right to be so brave, an English April no business to be so bright. There was no precedent for it; it was almost unconstitutional, but it was very beautiful, and it made a great many people very happy—especially Swift.

The weather that the poets have called the weather of the kingfisher stayed and stayed, giving its glory to everything, and calling with voice upon voice to all lovers of the country life to shake the dust of cities from their feet and face the highways that

lead through meadows to woods and lanes and waters and the hollows of the hills.

Swift began to long with a longing that was like a sickness to obey those voices, to feel upon his cheek the air of the fields, to breathe the odour of flowers, to drink from the Fountain of Youth, as he always drank when he escaped from the town into the country. Of old he would have answered the summons instantly—have thrust a book into his pocket, flung on his hat, and set out for a day-long wander, that brought him back at evening footsore, but heart-light, full of memories that enchanted, with cheeks that the sun had tanned, with clothes that the dust of many highways, the grass of many lanes, had stained. For then he was content to be alone, to walk where he pleased and how he pleased, his own master, with no need of other companion than his thoughts or the volume in his pocket. But now the voices of the spring called upon a changed worshipper. For Swift was no

longer alone in the world, no longer the austere master of his own caprice ; he hungered and thirsted for the country as much as ever, but he did not wish to taste its joys in solitude. He wanted the country, but he also wanted Candida for his companion in the country.

Hitherto his friendship for her, her friendship for him, had been bounded by a few streets, environed by a few houses. To walk with Candida through the echoing halls of the British Museum, to talk to her of the old Gods who long ago reigned on Olympus, of the old shepherds who long ago sang in Arcadia, this was indeed delightful. But it would be even more delightful to walk with her as in a living green Arcadia, to woo, in her company, the last and greatest of the Grecian Gods, even Pan himself, whose shaggy coat still hides wherever a hedgerow runs, whose goat-feet still caper wherever woods abound and fields spread to the sun, whose bearded face still mirrors itself in

unpolluted streams. The sound of his pipes along the hills and down the valleys is still ever the sweetest music in the world, to those happy few upon whom in their helpless cradle the rustic Pan has breathed. Great Pan is not dead to any child of the open air, for all the cry of the wind round Cape Misenum.

Swift was in a great degree a child of the open air. The necessity for making a living had compelled him to live in cities and to write in rooms, to haunt great libraries and be within touch of the printer's devil. But his heart was always with the country ; he was happiest when striding across a windy common, or climbing a kindly hill, or treading the needled carpet of a pine wood. It was, Oh to walk across a common with Candida, to sit with Candida beneath the shade of some gracious tree, to hear with Candida the first call of the cuckoo—the call that wakens at once all that is sylvan in the heart of the man whose inmost spirit still remembers the green woods !

After all, why should it not come to pass? The days as they drifted by in the splendour of their sunlight, in the illumination of their gold and colour, only seemed to make the friendship between Swift and Candida more intimate, more exquisite, more ideal. Candida accepted the friendship as if it had always been portion and parcel of her life; she treated Swift with something of the frankness that would have been natural if he had been another woman or she another man. He, on his part, drunk with delight at the kindliness of her comradeship, rejoiced and amazed at the rapture of his happiness, forgot, or tried to forget, that there was a time when this friendship had never been, and exorcised, or tried to exorcise, the thought that it could cease. She was willing to see him every day, and for a large part of every day. He had been allowed to come again and again to the dainty little room in Bury Street.

April had lingered out its life in ineffable

sweetness, and now May sat upon her throne, no less royal in the attributes of summer. If London could seem so fair in the golden atmosphere of those glorious days, how would not the world show in the clear, clean country? If Candida would only come! And why should she not come, she who seemed so disdainful of conventions, she who seemed so content with the conditions of their friendship? At least he decided it could do no harm to ask her. Even if she refused she was not likely to be angered by the proposition.

He suggested to her, diffidently, one afternoon early in May, that the weather was too fine to be wasted within the walls of even the British Museum.

‘You are fond of walking,’ he said. ‘Will you come for a walk? I have a vagrant mood upon me.’

She looked thoughtfully at him, and then glanced at a casemate in the room in which they were standing. The casemate was

open, and through its wired aperture came a glow of sunlight. There was a glimpse of green trees from the neighbouring gardens, and the chatter of birds came pleasantly upon the ear. Swift followed the direction of her glance.

‘Does not that tempt you?’ he asked. ‘If that square of sunlight and that little glimpse of leaves seem so alluring in this old place, how delightful the country would be! Let us assume that the spirits of the woods and the waters are calling to us, and let us obey the summons.’

‘It would be pleasant,’ she said softly — ‘very pleasant.’

‘I often take walks by myself,’ said Swift, ‘but it would be delightful to have you for my companion. I hope you do not think I ought not to ask you?’

‘Oh no,’ said Candida; ‘we are friends and comrades. But where could we go?’

‘Do you know Richmond Park?’ Swift asked.

A smile came and went on Candida's face too quickly for Swift to notice it.

‘Not very well,’ she said.

‘I am awfully fond of it,’ said Swift. ‘For a place so near to town it is full of pastoral possibilities. I go there very often, and I tell you what I often do—and what we might do, if you didn’t mind—I take my luncheon with me and eat it in the open air. One is as much alone as if one were in the backwoods.’

‘It sounds very pastoral and primitive and pleasant,’ said Candida. There was mirth in her eyes and mirth in her voice, but the proposal seemed to please her.

Swift was delighted.

‘It need not tire you much,’ he said. ‘We can take a train to Putney, walk from there to the Park, have our picnic at the foot of some tree, and then walk across the Park and come back by train from Richmond. Do come. It would be delightful!’

‘I will come with pleasure,’ Candida said. ‘Do not fear fatigue for me. I am not easily tired.’

‘This is excellent,’ he said. ‘I will bring some sandwiches and a bottle of claret.’

‘No,’ said Candida; ‘let us divide the burthen like brothers. You shall bring the claret, and I will bring the sandwiches. Besides, I am sure that my girl will cut them better than your landlady would.’

Swift, conscious of that worthy woman’s heavy hand in cookery, admitted that this was extremely probable. So it was all arranged, and Swift prayed for fine weather.

Fine weather was vouchsafed. Fine weather was the appanage of that unwonted time, when the trees wore the green livery of the spring well-nigh a month before their custom, when the fervid air seemed to belong to the June of the poets, when the laburnum blazed in yellow, and the lilac blazed in mauve, and the chestnuts showed their great

white candles like green altars to nature, and the crimson stars of the may burned everywhere, and burning filled the air with the incense of their strange, sweet scent.

Pessimists shook their heads over this untimely splendour; they saw in it only the prodigality of the spendthrift who squanders his inheritance with headlong haste, and they prophesied a dismal summer as the penalty for a divine spring. But the optimists hoped that this early glory was but the herald of happier, hotter days; and the opportunists, of whom Swift was one, did not trouble their heads about either fortune, but accepted with delight the fact of fine weather in season or out of season, and were prepared to make the most of it and the best of it while it lasted.

Thank heaven the sun shines to-day—this day that is like Hesperus, and that bringeth all good things: clear skies and Candida, green grass and green trees, and the colours of flowers, and the sounds of birds, and

escape from streets and houses—that brings sweet companionship, open friendship, hidden love.

Such was the wise mood in which Swift welcomed a wonderful day.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN RICHMOND PARK.

Only I lonely long
For the woodland life, for the strong
Cry of the cuckoo's song.

The Romany Road.

THE gleams of the morning sunlight, gladdening Swift with the fulfilment of his hope, seemed to shine ironically upon Swift's work-room, with its unused books and its neglected desk. Swift, even while he joyously ate his breakfast, joyously drank his tea, noted how the rays fell upon the backs of volumes which under other conditions would have been lying wide open upon his table and incessantly consulted. And instead of opening them now, he was going off as careless as a gipsy to wander in green places with the

most beautiful woman in the world. How much better it was to wander in green places with the most beautiful woman in the world than to bother about books! But the neglected books reminded him that he had neglected other things; that he had not been near the Windovers since the day when he sought, and sought in vain, for Mr. Drass; that he had forgotten all about the Pine Hill election; that he had seen nothing of Budget, and had not been near the Cordeliers for ages.

He felt penitent about the Windovers, but not very penitent, for he knew that Lucilla, if she knew, would readily forgive him. As for the Cordeliers, he only smiled a smile of satisfaction as he left his house to think that he was going for a walk with Candida instead of going to a committee meeting in St. Ethelfreda's Without. And yet there was a committee meeting that day, specially summoned by Budget, but Swift did not give it a thought.

At half-past eleven Swift stood at Candida's door, and rang the bell joyously. A small bottle of claret, artfully enveloped in brown paper, so as to resemble anything save its convivial self, occupied one of the roomy pockets of his yellow coat; a volume of verse occupied the other. In honour of the expedition Swift had mounted his straw hat, sunburnt with the suns of more than one summer, and bound with a plain black ribbon, for Swift did not belong to any aquatic or athletic club, and could fly no colours.

Candida opened the door to him herself, and Swift thought she looked more enchanting than ever as she stood there, framed in the square of the doorway, in her very neat, very simple, very dainty dress of blue serge, and the cool white blouse beneath the little open jacket.

If Swift had been a man experienced in the wear of women, he would have admired the perfection with which the plain attire

was made, and the modishness of the small straw hat that crowned Candida's dark hair. But he was not, and he only thought that she looked very nice, which, indeed, he would probably have thought if she had come to greet him garbed in an old flour-sack. Candida held a small square brown paper packet dangling by a string-loop from her finger.

'I was resolved not to keep you waiting for a second,' Candida said, 'and so I came to the door to be ready for you. The virtue of punctuality should not be the privilege of man. Here are the sacred sandwiches.'

Swift laughed and took the packet from her, and she drew the door to behind her.

'We have plenty of time,' he said as they went down the stone stairs. 'But it is very good of you to be punctual, none the less.'

When they got into Oxford Street, Swift was for calling a cab to drive them to Charing Cross, but Candida would not hear of this piece of extravagance.

'We have plenty of time to walk,' she

said ; ‘ therefore let us walk. Poor people like us cannot afford to spend money in that reckless way.’

‘ But won’t you be tired ?’ Swift asked dubiously. ‘ Remember that there is plenty of walking to do at the other end of our train journey.’

‘ So much the better,’ said Candida. ‘ We are going a-walking ; let us get all the walking we can. It will do us both good, and I think you will find that I am not easily fatigued. Remember that I am a country girl.’

So it was settled, and they walked along briskly towards Charing Cross in the best of spirits. The sun was bright, and made even the sordid streets look cheerful, for your sun is the best beautifier in the world and of the world, and the man and woman were as merry as a boy and girl. More than one of those whom they passed on their way looked with admiration at the beautiful girl in her simple, admirable attire, and looked with amazement

at her companion in his yellow suit and his old sunburnt straw hat. But if Candida noticed the admiration or the amazement, she showed no sign of notice; and as for Swift, he noticed nothing but his companion, thought of nothing but the fair fortune of the fair day.

At Charing Cross they caught a Metropolitan train to Putney. Here Swift insisted upon extravagance, and took first-class tickets, though Candida suggested that third-class would do very well, and that they certainly ought not to think of travelling higher than second. But Swift, who was very careless of his own comfort, and whose democratic theories always carried him to a third-class carriage, wanted to give Candida the best that it was in his power to offer her. There were not many people going out by that train, which left Charing Cross at a minute before noon, so they had a carriage all to themselves, and were very merry during their twenty minutes' transit.

Candida seemed to take the liveliest interest in everything that was to be seen from the windows of the carriage — the changing types of houses, the steady, merciless advance of brick and mortar upon what once had been smiling fields, the growing sense of a cleaner, more countrified air, as the train crossed the river. She pretended that Swift in his extravagance had secured a reserved carriage for her ; nay, more, had chartered a special train. He had never seen her so merry, in such high spirits, in all their infinite, intimate friendship, which was now some sweet weeks old. Her child-like mirthfulness made her young beauty seem yet younger, and its influence was deliciously contagious, bringing out in Swift all that was most brightly boyish in his unsophisticated nature. He felt quite sorry when the train came to East Putney, and was only able to console himself by remembering that the delight of the day was now to come, the delight of the walk with Candida.

And it was a pleasant walk. First through the Putney Street and the wide way of Putney Hill. Then across Putney Common, with its first fair breath of wildness after the servility of the abandoned, well-nigh forgotten city. Then the coming on the Portsmouth Road, with all the rich suggestions and imaginings that the union of those two simple words afforded—suggestions and imaginings of an earlier day when the history of Europe seemed to start from Portsmouth Hard, and when the demigod adventurers travelled post-chaise from the great city to the great sea-port to fight the French and find eternal glory. Then to come on Wimbledon Common, with its illustrious windmill holding its gaunt vanes to the soft sky, and the grayness of the common's tone dotted with the scarlet points of the golfers' coats. And so on, on by the gallant winding road past modern villas hideous in their modernity, and past old houses that seemed as if they must in their

day have been honest coaching inns, their bar-parlours not unfamiliar to highwaymen ; by trim gardens and spreading fields, until they came to the funny little row of modest suburban houses which, as Swift knew, announced the immediate nearness of the Park. The little houses were all very neat, and their tiny front gardens won the admiration of Candida, because of the brave show they made in flowers of the simpler favour. But they did not linger long over these modest houses. A few paces more and Swift turned his companion to the right, and they were face to face with the Robin Hood Gate of Richmond Park.

Once inside the gates of the Park, the wanderers seemed to pass, as if by enchantment, from town to country, from the pavement to the woodland.

‘ Now are we in Arden ! ’ cried Swift joyously, waving his hand towards the tall elms as if to congratulate them upon the advent of divinity.

Divinity looked up at him and laughed.

‘Please do not finish the quotation,’ she said, ‘unless you be indeed of the Touchstone humour. “Marry, the greater fool I! When I was at home I was in a better place.”’

Swift reddened slightly, and laughed too.

‘That was the folly of a motley fool!’ he said. ‘Your coxcomb is no shepherd. Withered brain and wry wit are not made for the country life. I suppose Touchstone took Audrey back to Court with him. I wonder how she liked it?’

‘Oh, famously,’ Candida answered. ‘She was made for the buttery hatch and chaffer with pages and men at arms. I doubt if she ever sent back a sigh towards Arden.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Swift. ‘Perhaps nobody ever loves the country so well as those who were born to cities. To me this place seems like the Earthly Paradise after Queen Square.’

They were walking under the great trees

skirting the wall that divides the Park from Kingston Vale. The withered bracken of the dead year crackled beneath their feet. Here and there, through the dry earth and the dead leaves, the pale green fronds of new ferns began to peep, called into life by the lovely spring. In front of them the ground was a network of burrows, in and out of which the quick, darting rabbits played or stood still with long ears lifted, watching the visitors' approach, and disappearing like bubbles as the human steps drew nearer. Above their heads a colony of rooks cawed vociferously in the swaying tree-tops. In the distance Swift pointed out to Candida a herd of dappled deer moving slowly across a green lawn, the antlers of the stags rising and falling like the lances of a marching army. The woods and the open were quick with animal sights and sounds, but there were no human beings to be seen. They seemed to be as much alone in the beautiful place as Adam and Eve in Eden. If it were

not for the low line of the wall, and the sight of an occasional red roof gleaming through the trees beyond it, they might have fancied themselves to be in the very heart of the country.

‘Is it not a delightful spot?’ Swift asked.

His exhilaration knew no bounds. Never before had he felt so conscious of the joy of being alive as now in that green and golden place, walking by the side of that beautiful girl. Between the trees he could see the warm air vibrating with the heat, and every vibration seemed to arouse and to respond to some pulse of pleasure in his own being. The April sky flew the brave blue banner of July, and Swift, looking up, saluted the standard with a grateful heart.

‘It is indeed!’ Candida answered.

She smiled up at him in sympathy with his enthusiasm, the enthusiasm which in him was always so simple and so boyish. She was silent for a minute as they moved slowly along between the trees, going in a

direction of which Swift had constituted himself the guide. Then she said again :

‘ You seem very earnest in your likings. Are you always in earnest about everything ?’

Swift looked down quickly, with a vague fear that she might be laughing at him—a fear that for the second made him feel quite sick at heart, and that flung a shadow over the bright sky and the brave world. But Candida’s face was perfectly grave, and her eyes were fixed upon a distant slope. He breathed again, and the shadow vanished and the sky was as gay, the world as gallant, as before.

‘ Of course I am in earnest. What is the good of life if one isn’t in earnest about living ? Where I believe, I believe with all my heart and with all my soul ; where I like, I like ; where I love, I love——’

He stopped, with the quick colour in his cheeks, and she finished his sentence for him hurriedly :

‘And where you hate, you hate, I suppose? Was that what you were going to say?’

He looked thoughtfully at a clearing across the ribbon of road some yards away, a clearing bright with sun, where the rabbits were racing about in sheer enjoyment of the game of life.

‘I suppose so,’ he said slowly. ‘I don’t know—I don’t think—that I am much of a hater; at least, as far as I myself am concerned. I have never had occasion to hate anyone. I dare say I have disliked people, but hate is a great term, and it is a pity to degrade it to a substitute for spite.’

‘Hasn’t somebody said somewhere,’ Candida asked, ‘that those only love well who hate well?’

‘It was Dr. Johnson, I think,’ Swift answered. ‘He said a great many things that he didn’t exactly mean, I fancy. I don’t think it is true. I hope it isn’t true.’

‘If anyone wronged you very much, do

you think you could hate them?' Candida asked with a gravity that defied grammar.

'I don't know,' Swift answered. 'Hate is such a hopeless kind of thing nowadays. We don't fight duels, we don't even hire bravos—and I don't write paragraphs for the papers.'

'I don't think I was thinking of a man,' said Candida; 'I think I was thinking of women. If women wronged—if a woman wronged you, could you hate her, do you think?'

'The problem hardly comes within the range of practical politics,' Swift said with a laugh; 'but I think not—I hope not. A man must be such a poor sort of a blackguard to hate a woman, it seems to me. What do you say to this tree?'

'Good-morning, tree,' said Candida, with an air of pretty pertness that made Swift shout with boyish laughter.

He had brought their walk to a halt in front of a mighty elm whose roots swelled

out above the surface of the earth and sloped away in graceful curves. It was quite a lonely place—a place that seemed especially to invite wayfarers to repose.

‘I am sure the Hamadryad should be grateful for your gracious salutation,’ said Swift. ‘But that is not exactly what I meant. I wanted to know if you thought this tree would be a pleasant kind of camping-ground for us?’

‘Oh yes!’ said Candida—‘quite delightful. These gnarled roots will make excellent chairs.’ She sat down on the biggest roots, and, leaning back against the tree, smiled up at him. ‘I feel like a very gipsy. Do I look like a gipsy?’

As she glanced up at him, with her dark-blue eyes rendered darker by the shadow of the brim of her hat, with a warmer blood in her dark cheek from the exertion of the walk, with the deep darkness of her hair and the rich redness of her lips, she did, for the moment, seem to wear something of

a gipsy favour. The very laughter that curled her mouth gave to her face an air of exquisite mockery that might well have become one of the daughters of the mysterious race.

Swift made her a salutation of solemn reverence, which was more of a tribute to her beauty than a concession to her jesting mood.

‘If a gipsy,’ he said, ‘then, indeed, the queen of the gipsies.’

Her face suddenly grew grave.

‘Perhaps I should make a good gipsy,’ she said. ‘But if so, I should certainly wish to be queen of the gipsies.’

The vehemence of her tone, the gravity of her voice, of her face, surprised him. He sat down beside her on another tree-root, holding in his hand the little bottle of claret, which he had taken out of the roomy pocket in which it had been resting.

‘It would scarcely be difficult for you to queen it anywhere,’ he said. ‘But does sovereignty so greatly tempt you?’

“Better the first man in the village than the second man in Rome,” she answered.

She was merry again, and her eyes mocked him.

‘The man who said that,’ Swift commented, ‘knew very well in his heart of hearts that he was going to be the first man in Rome.’

‘Very well,’ said Candida. ‘Perhaps I know in my heart of hearts that I am going to be——’

‘Queen of the gipsies?’ Swift suggested.

He did not mean the words for a challenge, but she answered them with as much vivacity as if she took them for a challenge.

‘Queen of the gipsies—queen of something—queen of anything—who knows? But now let us talk no more of queens and kings. Are we not democrats, you and I—or, at least, equal monarchs—here in this lonely woodland? Fellow-sovereign, may I offer you a sandwich?’

She had unfastened the package while she

was speaking, and now held it out to him invitingly.

Swift took a sandwich and placed it by his side on a piece of paper while he proceeded to draw the little bottle of wine. When he had done it he drew from another pocket—that yellow coat of his was a marvel of pockets—two small glasses, one of which fitted into the other, and both of which, being of the flattened shape affected by the travelled, took up but little room. Candida meanwhile went on quietly munching her sandwiches with the healthy appetite of a well-organized young woman who is hungry after walking.

Swift filled the larger of the two glasses with the red wine, and handed it to his companion. Then he filled his own.

‘I drink,’ he said, ‘to the queen of the gipsies.’

And he pledged Candida with his eyes as he drank his wine.

‘And I,’ said Candida, ‘I drink as the old

Romans would have drunk, to the genius of this place, to the kindly spirit that lingers in these woods and grasses, and watches benignly over the wanderers who come within its domain.'

And as she spoke she sipped her wine and her eyes laughed at Swift over the edge of the glass.

'By all means,' said Swift. 'Genio loci—to the genius of this place. I dare swear it has never been so saluted before.' And as he spoke he inverted his almost empty glass and allowed a few crimson drops to trickle down its sides and drop in small splashes upon the dusty soil. 'You see,' he said, 'I make libation.'

Candida followed his example.

They were silent for a little while. Then, 'This is very pleasant,' Candida said softly to herself.

It certainly was very pleasant, Swift thought, to sit there in that green place with Candida by his side, sharing their bread and

wine like two tramps out of a dream. He stretched himself out on the soft grass and looked up at her. She was gazing across the glade, but she was gazing vaguely, as if her thoughts were otherwise than with what her eyes beheld.

‘This is delightful,’ Swift said softly, almost sighing for very pleasure. ‘I feel as if I should like to raise an altar in gratitude to the rustic divinity.’

He looked around him again complacently, and began to murmur to himself a few lines of Greek verse. The girl turned sharply and looked at him.

‘What are you saying?’ she asked abruptly.

Swift looked up with a smile, somewhat surprised to find her face so set.

‘I was saying to myself,’ he answered, ‘some lines from the Greek Anthology, lines attributed to Plato, in which the singer bids his hearers to “sit down by this high-leaved, voiceful pine, that rustles her branches

beneath the western breezes, and beside my babbling waters the pipe of Pan shall bring drowsiness down upon thy enchanted eyelids." Are they not delightful?

Candida moved her head impatiently, and there was the shadow of a frown upon her forehead.

'Why must you always quote things?' she asked. 'We seem to live in an age of quotations, unable to be anything, to do anything, to enjoy anything, unless we can fortify ourselves first by repeating like a charm something that some Greek, or Roman, or Italian, or Frenchman, or German, or Chinese, said before us. Can we not admire a fine day in a fair place without dragging in Plato to bolster us up in our delight? We are so dreadfully unreal, all of us; we seem to live in the shades of others instead of casting shadows of our own.'

Swift had never seen Candida so nearly approach to being angry before, and he felt

guilty at having annoyed her. So he answered her apologetically, with an uneasy laugh :

‘ Was it so dreadfully unreal to quote poor old Plato ? The words seemed to chime in my mind with the time and the place.’

‘ No, they didn’t,’ said the girl decisively. ‘ To begin with, we are not sitting under a pine-tree at all, but an honest English elm. In the next place, we don’t believe in Pan even as your Plato might have believed in him ; it’s only an affectation. In the third place, we are not Greeks of Arcady at all, but an English man and an English woman sitting in a suburban park. It is so far, far better to be a real thing than a reflection.’

Her voice softened suddenly as she saw how her little gust of anger had brought a troubled look into Swift’s face.

‘ I dare say I don’t express what I mean very well,’ she said. ‘ But I do know what I mean, and that at least is something.’

‘I think I understand your meaning very well,’ said Swift. ‘But I do not think, surely, that either of us is much to blame. We are ourselves, we two; we live our own lives after our own fashion, free and straightforward. It is not a line from a Greek poet that will turn us into hypocrites.’

The girl’s face was turned away from Swift, and he did not see the sadness on it. But as she looked round at him now her lips and her eyes were smiling.

‘You are quite right,’ she said, ‘my dear friend, and I am a peevish imp to-day. You are as honest as the day—and I am as honest as the night—and between us we may perhaps succeed a little in remoulding the world nearer to the heart’s desire. Who knows?’

Swift’s heart beat like drum-taps. He raised himself upon one arm and looked eagerly into her eyes.

‘What do you mean?’ he said.

‘I mean many things, nothing, everything.’

I don't know what I mean to-day. Come, shall we tramp again ?

And Candida rose lightly to her feet ; Swift sprang up, too, and stood beside her.

‘Do you mean that perhaps——’ he began, but the girl checked him.

‘Remember,’ she said, and laid her finger upon her lips. Swift inclined his head in a mute repentance. His pulses, that had begun to beat so hotly, flagged again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOLLOW PLACE.

Even Arcady

Is still a portion of our common earth,
And those that dwell therein, however blessed,
Must not be counted as immortal gods,
But mortals set by danger everywhere,
Even where the world is greenest.

Alcibiades: A Comedy.

THERE was, however, only a momentary silence between them. If Candida's face had grown grave for a moment, it now smiled as gaily as ever, and her smile dispelled the chill that came over Swift's heart at the fear of offending her. Briskly he set himself to dissipate all signs of the feast—to roll up the brown paper into the smallest possible compass, and to bury it and the friendly flagon

carefully under a clump of nettles. Candida watched his activity with an approving glance.

‘Where shall we go now?’ said Candida, after Swift had finished his task and restored the glasses to his pocket.

‘If you are not tired——’ Swift began.

‘I am never tired!’ Candida interrupted.

‘Very well, then, I propose that we go along the Park towards Ham Gate, and so by the Common to the towing-path and back to Richmond for the train. It is a delightful way to walk.’

‘Excellent. Onward!’ Candida answered, and in another moment they were moving quickly through the trees in the direction that Swift had proposed.

Soon the ground sloped a little into a kind of gentle hill. Near the top a tall tree stretched a great curved branch across their path. Candida gave a little cry of joy.

‘How delightful!’ she said; ‘I can just reach it.’ And before Swift could understand

her intention she had swung herself lightly into the seat that the great bough afforded, and began to swing herself up and down, pushing the ground with her foot every time that the rustling bough came low enough to allow her to do so.

‘Oh, this is delightful!’ she cried, looking with a flushed, laughing face at Swift’s somewhat amazed one. ‘I feel like a little child again. Swing me, please. “Hush-a-bye, baby, on the tree-top; when the wind blows, the cradle will rock.”’

‘“If the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,”’ said Swift, completing the quotation anxiously, as he caught hold of one end of the bough and scanned it to test its strength. ‘Are you sure the bough is strong enough?’

‘To bear my weight? Thanks for the compliment. Don’t be afraid. It is strong enough—and if it breaks it breaks. “Down will come cradle, baby and all.”’

And Candida laughed again as Swift, in

obedience to her wish, swung his end of the bough, and the girl rose and dipped among the green leaves like a boat dancing on a green sea.

It came to Swift, suddenly, that she had never seemed so beautiful as she seemed now, swaying with a kind of childish rapture with the swaying bough, and laughing in harmony with the music that the tree made as the motion caused its branches to quiver and its leaves to rustle up to the very pinnacle of its woodland pride. She might be a nymph of the woods, he thought—something less and more than human, one of those mystical creatures who haunt the hearts of German forests, and break the hearts of hunters, and craze the brains of lonely charcoal-burners. He felt a wild longing to clasp her in his arms and kiss her, kiss her again and again, while he cried out a passion that filled his veins with flame. And yet, even with the thought, he felt a greater fear of her, a greater hopelessness

of ever quickening any love for him in her strange, wild heart. She may have read something of his thoughts, for she leaped lightly off the bough and stood, flushed, panting, but imperious, by his side.

‘There!’ she said, ‘enough of that. I am tired of swinging.’

She looked around her with a sudden curiosity. At the point where they stood, on a crest of the rising ground, they could see over the Park wall in front of them the roofs and gables of a house. It was one of the many villas of Kingston Vale, and it lay so deep in the little valley that their eyes were on a level with its highest towers, and could look down upon as much of the roof as was visible amidst the trees of its garden. It was a picturesque house, mainly red in colour, and it seemed to have been put together whimsically, in an amalgamation of many orders and many periods of architecture. There was a wing that would have welcomed a gentleman of the Augustan

age of Anne. There was a belfry that might have sheltered the head of a sixteenth-century Flemish burgher. There was a sham classic colonnade that would have tickled the taste of a Georgian recluse. Yet the whole thing, in its quaint incongruity, was very decidedly modern. A great gilded weathercock swung on the top of a little turret and glittered in the sun.

Candida laughed softly to herself as she looked with evident interest at the place. Swift, following the direction of her glance, gazed too, and felt slightly offended at the confusion of styles which the house displayed.

‘How odd!’ Candida said, seeming to speak rather to herself than with any idea of directly addressing her companion. ‘I wonder if they could see us from that house?’

Swift imagined that Candida was unwilling to have been seen swinging so unconventionally in the bough of the tree, and though

he was a little surprised to find her paying any heed to such a chance, he hastened to reassure her.

‘I really don’t think anyone could see us,’ he said, ‘with so many trees between us. And even if they could, there does not seem to be a sign of anyone about. If there were anyone at any of those windows in the turret I think I should see them.’

Candida did not seem to heed Swift’s reassurances. She still kept her eyes fixed on the house, and she still smiled softly to herself, as if she was very much amused at some memory.

‘It certainly would be very funny,’ she said, still more to herself than to Swift, ‘if he——’

‘What would be funny?’ Swift inquired, now fairly mystified; ‘and who is “he”?’

Candida looked away from the house, looked at Swift’s puzzled face, and laughed again.

‘Oh, nothing,’ she said, ‘only that I once

knew—or, rather, my father once knew—a man who lived in that house. He was a soldier, a neighbour of ours in the country. I was only amused at thinking how amazed he would be if he were to look out and see the little girl he knew jumping up and down in the branch of a tree with the assistance of a great Greek scholar !

Swift was a little surprised, but only a little. If now and then, as at this moment, he was made aware of how little he knew of the past life of the girl who had become his so constant companion, the thought scarcely troubled him. His admiration for her was so complete, his devotion so absolute, his joy in the living present so intense, that it never occurred to him to question Candida about her past, or, indeed, ever to think of that past and its possibilities with any serious speculation. Yet as she stood before him now, laughing and looking at the strange house that lay below them, he felt as he had felt before, that a chasm lay between their

two lives which he had not the power to bridge.

Candida noticed the shade of gravity that had stolen over Swift's face, and she looked away from the house and stopped laughing, though she still smiled.

'Come,' she said, 'onward. We are lazy wayfarers, you and I, and seize every pretext for a halt.'

She turned, and began to climb higher up the slope, so quickly that Swift had to exert himself to keep by her side, while he admired the sylvan vigour of her movements, the elasticity of her splendid youth.

At the top of the slope there was a little coppice of young trees enclosed by a slight railing, and in the grass at the foot of these trees a quantity of bluebells were growing. When Candida saw them she gave a cry of delight, and declared that she must needs gather some. Swift offered to defy the forest laws by vaulting over the railing and getting

some for her, but Candida would not hear of this suggestion.

In another moment she had whisked herself and her skirts dexterously and gracefully over the little paling, and was on her knees in the young grass, pulling with both hands at the bluebells. The whole purpose of her being seemed centred upon getting the flowers. Swift stared at her in some wonder—wonder at her shifting moods, at her strange alternations of jest and earnest, at her frequent gravity, her occasional air of weariness contrasting strangely with her fits of childlike frolicsomeness, of childlike pleasure in the easily attainable. She looked so young, so impulsive, so lightly happy as she stooped there in the coppice gathering her hyacinths, that she seemed to Swift more of an enigma than ever. Swift had known but few women in his time, and his knowledge of those few did not help him to understand Candida.

Presently she came back to him, her eyes

bright with delight, and her cheeks flushed by her exertions. She handed him a large bunch of the pretty blue flowers over the top of the paling.

‘Hold these for a moment, please, while I get over,’ she said. ‘Are they not beautiful?’

Swift had scarcely taken the bunch into his hands before Candida had skimmed over the fence, as easily and as gracefully as before, and had taken the flowers from his grasp.

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘it is always delightful to gather wild-flowers. You ought to write me some verses—“To Candida gathering Bluebells”—something in the manner of Herrick, you know, full of pretty phrases for me and delicate regrets for the inevitable.’

‘Ah!’ said Swift, with a sigh, ‘I am towards myself of Touchstone’s mind towards Audrey—I would the Gods had made me poetical.’

Candida shrugged her shoulders.

‘One may be poetical without writing

poetry,' she said. 'Would you love this scene any the more dearly because you were trying to shape a sonnet in its honour?'

They were now on the summit of the rising ground, and the park stretched away before them—a green plain dotted with clumps of trees, and traversed by a white ribbon of road.

'It is good to look at, is it not?' said Swift. 'And all within such a little distance of squares and streets and slums. We could almost hear the roar of London. But if we pleased, we could gain a greater quiet in this quiet place. You see how flat the ground looks before us?'

Candida nodded.

'Well,' Swift went on, 'there is, almost at our feet as it were, a spot wherein fifty men might lie concealed, and no one who walked on yonder road be ever the wiser.'

'Where?' Candida asked, looking all round her with surprise. 'I see no place where a cat could hide.'

‘Come a little farther and you will,’ Swift said. ‘Do you see where those tufts of grass seem to grow a little thicker than the rest? Well, just beyond them there is a great hollow in the earth, so deep and wide that, as I said, I am sure fifty men could lie there unseen. I have lain there myself by the hour together, delighting in the sense that I was alone in the world, and that if an army was marching by on yonder highway I should be invisible to them.’

‘It sounds most romantic,’ Candida said. ‘Show me your cave, gentle hermit.’

‘Come,’ Swift answered, ‘let us imagine that we are seeking shelter in a strange land.’

He walked forward for a few yards in silence, Candida keeping close by his side. Suddenly the green seemed to yawn, and in another moment they were standing on the edge of the chasm of which Swift had spoken. It was a sloping, irregular, sandy pit, partly overgrown with coarse grass and gorse bushes. As Swift had said, it would

have easily sheltered half a hundred men from the observation of anyone who did not come to its immediate edge.

At the moment, however, when Candida and Swift approached it, it only served to shelter one man. But it sheltered him so effectively that the pair had got to the very lip of the pit before they perceived that it had an occupant. A man was lying in the hole, lying on his stomach, on the slope of the pit which was nearest to the wall of the Park and farthest from the road. His face was raised a very little above the level of the pit's mouth, but it was concealed by the low bushes, through whose branches he seemed to be peering as if he were watching very intently something in the direction of the wall. He was so intent upon his watching, and Swift and Candida had come so quietly to the edge of the hole, that he had not heard their approach.

Now, however, Swift, startled to find his lair in the possession of a stranger, gave an

involuntary sound of surprise, which roused the man's attention. He swung round for a moment on his side and glanced up at the new-comers, shading his eyes with his hand as he did so, for the sun was strong and beat hotly on the pit. The sight seemed to cause him more surprise than his presence had caused to the new-comers, for he immediately fell on to his face again and lay so for a second or two quite still, as if he had been shot. Then suddenly he swung himself to his left side, so as to present his back to them, and, leaping to his feet, scrambled quickly up the further side of the pit and proceeded to run away across the grass as fast as his legs could carry him.

Swift and Candida stared at each other for a moment in amazement, and then, with one accord, they burst out laughing heartily.

‘Well,’ said Candida, pointing to the man, who was still running as if for dear life among the trees, ‘we seem to have startled one cave man a good deal.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Swift; ‘he must be some confirmed solitary, who resented our intrusion.’

‘Or who, perhaps, was repelled by our personal appearance,’ Candida suggested. ‘He was evidently in so great a hurry to depart that he did not notice that he had left some of his property behind him.’

And Candida pointed to where, on the ground of the pit, a small object lay.

The object at which Candida pointed was a small piece of paper, folded square. Swift went down into the pit and picked it up. It was a curious yellowish colour and of thin texture, so that Swift could see through the folds that it was covered with some kind of black characters. Swift’s first idea was to signal to the man, but when he looked up for this purpose the man was out of sight.

‘Where has he vanished to?’ Swift asked of Candida, who had come down and was standing by his side.

‘The man?’ Candida answered. ‘He dis-

appeared behind those trees ;' and she pointed to a clump of trees at the other side of the road.

'What odd paper this is!' said Swift, showing it to his companion. 'And it seems to be full of writing.'

'Open it and see,' Candida suggested ; and, as Swift was really curious, he obeyed the suggestion and unfolded the paper.

It was a large piece of paper when it was unfolded—of an oblong shape and a faded yellow tinge. It was covered with large characters that conveyed no meaning to Swift, and appeared to be printed by some common process, as in many places the ink was very pale.

'Well,' said Swift, as he showed it to Candida, 'I am no wiser than before.'

'Oh, I am so sorry,' sighed Candida ; 'I felt sure that you would know, and I am dying of curiosity.'

'I think it is some Eastern script,' Swift said. 'But I am sorry to say that my

limited education does not include Eastern tongues.'

'And is there no way of finding out?' Candida asked.

'Oh yes,' said Swift, 'I can easily find out what it means if you wish.'

'Why, of course I wish,' she said. 'Who would not wish to know what those mysterious symbols mean? I am sure it must be something interesting.'

'I know a man,' said Swift, 'who is a great linguist. I believe he can read and write every language under heaven. He does a great deal of work for the Museum, and he lives quite near to me. I will take it to him for elucidation.'

'And then you will tell me all about it.'

'I will, indeed,' Swift answered, and then he folded up the paper and put it carefully into his pocket-book.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TURN OF HASSAN DRASS.

Although I most devoutly disbelieve
In necromancers' nonsense, and the web
Of glamour that your wizard tries to weave,
There is a kind of softness at my heart
For all the juggling fellowship.

The Devil's Comedy.

As a matter of fact, however, Swift forgot all about the mysterious paper. He had laid it between the leaves of the book he was carrying that day, which happened to be Shakespeare's 'Sonnets,' and on the following day he chose another book for his companion, and the little volume of Shakespeare lay on his table unheeded. Swift forgot many things in those delightful days of dawning

summer that were of greater moment than a scrap of paper with strange signs upon it. He forgot, or he neglected, which came to the same thing, the claims of friendship, the claims of politics, the claims of business. The Windovers might never have existed; the Cordeliers might have been transplanted to Cloud-Cuckoo-Town, Cripple and Co. have been no better than a solar myth, for all the heed Swift paid to them.

It was Candida, Candida, and always Candida. Since their expedition to Richmond Park their friendship seemed to have grown closer, stronger, dearer, more delightful than before. The fine weather persisted, and the example of their first adventure was persistently followed. The British Museum was abandoned, and the careless couple went wandering, day after day, in the green and gracious places which girdle London, as happy and as heedless as if they were indeed what they called themselves in jest—a pair of tramps. And as their bodies

had broken away from the Museum, their minds no longer occupied themselves with antiquity. The Gods of Greece were suffered to sleep undisturbed on the summits of Olympus; the man and the woman busied themselves, very youthfully, with problems.

Swift was always in earnest; Candida was always curious. She told him one day that she had read the 'Cry for Liberty,' and she questioned him as to the various doctrines laid down in that remarkable volume with a closeness and a quickness that Swift at times found perplexing. The sonorous phrases seemed to be less convincing to Swift after Candida had repeated them to him and asked him for interpretation. The 'Cry' did not seem so complete a body of social philosophy as Swift had hitherto believed it to be after some of these examinations. He had formulated certain theories, which he believed to be very broad theories, of the relationships between man

and woman; had advocated and had felt delighted to advocate a system of free love. He had felt very sure at the time that these views were very sensible; he was not quite so sure now, when Candida, divinely smiling and divinely frank, interrogated him as to the permanent applicability of his ideas. But he stuck to his guns gallantly, defended himself and his opinions as well as he could, and fell deeper and deeper in love with his companion every day.

And yet in all that time they talked no word of love. If Swift felt the sweet ache at his heart, outwardly the alliance was only friendship. Candida had laid down her conditions, and Swift had accepted them, and he meant to keep his promise. It was at times a kind of torture to him to be thus incessantly in the company of a woman he loved so well, and never to say word and never to look look that should betray his passion. But his honour was at stake, not merely in his promise to Candida, but in his

adhesion to the great theory of the 'Cry for Liberty,' the theory of the possibility of friendship between a man and a woman as absolute as between a man and a man. So he thought of his love as of the genie in the Arabian tale, that it must be shut down in the compass of its little jar by virtue of the seal of Solomon.

And so through the golden days of that golden prime he saw Candida daily, and walked with her and talked with her as he would have walked and talked with any man who was his friend, when all the while he was longing to tell her that he loved her ; and he shook hands with her at meeting and at parting in the manliest way, when his whole being was eager to catch her in his arms and kiss her on the lips. Even as to the shaking of hands Candida had reminded him that in the 'Cry for Liberty' he had derided these and the like ceremonies as antiquated conventionalities hampering to the intelligent intercourse of humanity. And

Swift, embarrassed, had said that some conventionalities were comparatively harmless, and that the shaking of hands was excusable as a sign of friendship. So they went on shaking hands at meeting and parting, and Swift went on being exquisitely happy and exquisitely unhappy.

Candida, on her side, took the friendship with the sweet gravity, the smiling composure, which seemed to be her attitude towards life. Her hand, when she gave it, rested as calmly in Swift's hand as if no thought of anything but friendship could ever come into their lives; her eyes looked into his with an untroubled calm; and the frankness of her speech, when she argued out the questions of the 'Cry for Liberty' with its distinguished author, made her serenity, made her indifference to what might be, the more convincing and the more tantalizing. She went about with Swift as tranquilly as if she and he were doing the most ordinary thing in the world, as if

young flesh never took fire, as if young blood never mutinied.

She seemed so sure of herself, so sure of him, so independent of and heedless of the ordinary rules that regulate the relations of free men with free women, that Swift, whose business it had been to defy conventionality in season and out of season, whose 'Cry' was the very counterblast to all accepted things, was surprised at her absolute unconventionality—so surprised that once or twice he was startled to find himself suggesting to her, in a diffident, half-hearted way, that, perhaps, she didn't know how unconventional their actions were.

She silenced these suggestions by felicitous and apt quotations from the 'Cry for Liberty,' and by assuring him that she meant to live her life in her own way, that she believed in freedom, and that she was content for the present to be governed by her own theories of right and wrong and by the admirable views of the 'Cry.' So Swift

had nothing more to say, and the amazing friendship prospered.

Since their essays in the sylvan life they were more together than ever. They almost always made their middle meal now like true gipsies, under a tree in some green woodland or in some tranquil reach of the river, for Swift, who loved boating, had soon discovered that Candida could pull an oar as well as he. And when they came back to town they would dine together very simply, but very pleasantly, at a little Italian restaurant which Swift had discovered long ago, a tranquil place in a quiet street out of a very crowded street, a kind of backwater from a roaring main current of London life, a place which, when you entered it, seemed to transport you at once to the Continent and to Continental ways. Candida made no demur to dining daily with Swift; the only thing she insisted upon was that if he paid for the dinner one day she should pay for it on the next. At first Swift was for protest-

ing, but Candida was decided. If he agreed to that she would dine with him as often as he liked. If he did not agree to it she would not dine with him at all. So Swift could not choose but consent, and so it came about that they dined together daily, very joyously and very modestly, on the principle of alternate host, in the quiet, kindly little restaurant, whose people at last got to know them and to expect their coming and salute them cheerily. After these dinners Swift would escort Candida home to Bury Street, and at Bury Street he always parted from her. She never asked him to come in, and he never asked to be allowed to come in. They always shook hands in the doorway, and Swift always waited till the last sound of Candida's ascending footsteps had died away, and then he went on to Queen Square to read himself sleepy over Plato, and so to dream of Candida and the next day's joy.

One day towards the end of May, on a

return from one of their expeditions, Swift's attention was arrested by an advertisement in the railway-station. It was one of the many large coloured posters with which the Imperial Theatre of Varieties adorned the walls of London, posters which presented a number of pictorial representations of performers of all kinds, from dancing girls to dancing elephants. The particular picture which caught Swift's eye represented a man in Eastern costume encircled by gigantic snakes, and the legend announced the unparalleled performances of Hassan Drass, the great Indian snake-charmer. This could be no other than his mysterious host, and Swift immediately resolved that he would go and see him. A study of the column in an evening newspaper devoted to the music-halls informed him that Mr. Drass's turn came late in the evening's entertainment. So after Candida and he had dined together, and after he had seen her home to Bury Street, instead of going on to his own rooms

in Queen Square, he turned back towards town and steered for the Imperial Theatre of Varieties.

The Imperial Theatre of Varieties was London's largest, London's latest music-hall. It was the stateliest temple that had yet been erected to the grotesque Muse ; it was a splendid shrine for the great goddess. It gave the completest expression to that passion for the variety entertainment which was London's dominant enthusiasm. Swift did not share the enthusiasm, though he had often gone to music-halls with Budget, and even on occasion with the Windovers. But the Imperial Theatre was new to him, and he admired its magnificence ironically as he entered its glittering vestibule. He was anxious to get a seat as near to the front as possible. But the Imperial Theatre was popular, the evening was half over ; there was not a seat left. So Swift, on the suggestion of the man in the box-office, took a ticket for the promenade, which allowed him

to walk all round the stalls and to stand where he pleased in the space allotted for promenaders.

He took up his position by a pillar quite near to the stage, and waited. He had bought a programme as he came in, and the programme informed him that the turn of the snake-charmer was number sixteen. The number now displayed at the sides was fourteen, and was, as he learned from his programme, the number of the turn of the Sisters Aaron. The Sisters Aaron were four young ladies of a showily handsome, obviously Jewish favour, who were singing in chorus a song that informed the listeners that they were 'the models, yes, the models of the English aristocracy.' Swift did not approve of the English aristocracy, but he did not think that such specimens of its womenkind as he had seen at all resembled the Sisters Aaron, who, however, asserted their theory with much noise and persistence. They did not amuse Swift, and his glance wandered

over the full house with the interest he always felt in crowds.

It was not at all the habitual music-hall audience. The Imperial Theatre of Varieties affected grandeur; most of the visitors to the more expensive places came in evening dress; there were a quantity of women in the boxes, and even in the stalls, who looked obviously smart. Some of the people Swift knew by sight. Lord Lancelot was in the stage-box with a number of handsome women; in the stalls he recognised one of the younger members of the Government, who seemed to be entertaining a party of friends. Close to him in a corner stall sat someone he knew personally—Theocritus Marlowe, the writer of rhymes. He was not surprised to find Marlowe there.

He knew that Marlowe, tired of being overshadowed by Jack Harris in the propagation of the Higher Culture, had constituted himself the Apostle of the Music-Hall, the preacher, in melodious verse, of the

New Gospel of the Variety Show. Marlowe, who was listening with an intent air of rapture to the utterances of the Sisters Aaron, sighed a faint sigh, half of pleasure, half of regret, as that remarkable turn came to an end. Then, as he glanced away from the stage, he saw Swift standing by the pillar, and immediately got up and came over to talk to him. Swift had a kind of interest for Theocritus Marlowe. A man who could do without so many of the things which seemed to him to be essential to the acceptance of life was a curious problem, a host as worthy of attention as a contortionist, a performing dog, or a Mammoth Comique. Also Theocritus felt that it would look rather nice for him to be seen in the carefully harmonized black and white of his evening dress, standing in speech with a big man in a cheap yellow suit. So he saluted Swift with that air of languor which, in his mind, lent a piquancy to his chosen part as patron of the

music-hall, and Swift accepted his salutation with composure.

‘What have you come here for, Swift?’ he asked. ‘Does this sort of thing’—and he waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the stage, where an energetic gentleman was doing an imitation of a brass band—‘does this sort of thing come within the range of practical politics, or are you an emissary of the County Council come to mark us down for judgment?’

‘For none of these reasons,’ Swift answered composedly. ‘I have come to see the man with the snakes.’

‘Oh yes, the Serpent King,’ Marlowe said. ‘He is quite interesting—quite nice. You come in the nick of time, too; it is just his turn.’

For already the gentleman who simulated the brass band had, as it were, blown himself off the stage, and the attendants were slipping the number sixteen into the spaces. The great curtains of yellow brocade had fallen,

and remained down for some appreciable seconds, during which Marlowe amiably pointed out to Swift various celebrities who were present in the house. Then the curtains were drawn aside for the entertainment of the Serpent King.

There was a kind of enclosure set up on the stage—an enclosure formed of solid brass railings. In the middle of this enclosure sat the performer, habited like a dervish. Behind him were two large boxes strongly bound with iron. For a few seconds the man sat quite still with his gaze bent on the ground; then he slowly lifted his face and gazed steadfastly at the audience. Swift's curiosity was satisfied. The Serpent King was certainly his host of Camden Town. The persistent gaze, that was so intent that it seemed like the stare of a seeker, travelled quickly over the audience. For a moment it rested on that part of the house where Swift stood by the pillar, and Swift felt certain that the snake-charmer had seen him, had

recognised him. It was but the briefest glance, and yet Swift saw, or thought he saw, in it a suggestion of displeasure at his presence, which he was at a loss to account for.

The man began his performance. He opened the great coffers that stood behind him on their trestles, and he drew out from them great coils of monstrous shining snakes that he laid about him on the floor within the enclosure. Swift could not avoid giving a kind of shudder as he thought of the circumstances under which he had first seen those terrible beasts who now crawled and wriggled round and round their master as if something in his very presence invincibly attracted them. When the enclosure was alive with snakes the man began to play with them, winding the hugest of the beasts round his body, twisting smaller ones round his arms, till it was hardly possible to see anything of his body for the mass of serpents that encircled him. Their weight alone must have been enormous, but he seemed to support it

with ease. If those awful coils had tightened a little more they would inevitably have squeezed out the man's life, but the creatures seemed to be entirely under his domination, and to obey his slightest word or wish. At some sign from him they all uncurled themselves and left him free; then he began to play to them on a little pipe that he plucked from his girdle, and all the snakes, big and little, began to move about the enclosure rhythmically to the fantastic music that came with the piper's breath. There was something curiously attractive in seeing the man standing there blowing plaintive, alluring sounds from his reed, and the striped and spotted beasts swaying to the music and gliding about in a kind of ecstasy of fascination. After he had played for a few minutes, he stopped and began tossing the snakes about again, tying them into knots, winding them in and out of the bars of the enclosure, and in other ways showing his absolute command over his fantastic satellites. Then

the Indian began to put the reptiles back into their boxes. His turn was only a brief one—it was just at an end—but it fascinated while it lasted, and the audience was prodigal of applause.

Swift turned hurriedly to Marlowe.

‘I wonder,’ he said, ‘if there is any way by which I could get a word with that man. If I went round to the stage-door, I suppose I could send in my name to him. Do you know the way to the stage-door?’

‘Do I know the way to the stage-door?’ Theocritus answered with an amused smile. ‘Of course I do; but by the time you got there the fellow might be gone, and waiting at a stage-door is a slow business, any way. If you want to see him at once, I can manage it for you.’

Swift answered that he should be very much obliged, whereupon Marlowe told him to come with him, and led him down to a door at the end of the promenade, a door which was marked ‘Private.’ The curtains,

which had fallen, lifted again just as they reached it, and showed the snake-charmer standing gravely on the stage with his arms folded, accepting with inclined head the plaudits of the public.

Marlowe opened the private door, which led directly to the stage. A servant in the sumptuous livery affected by the Imperial Theatre stood on the other side. He looked at Marlowe, and immediately drew aside and let him pass through. Swift followed him on the stage.

‘I am one of the directors,’ Marlowe said to Swift, ‘so I can come and go as I please. Ah, there is our Indian friend looking after his precious worms. Come along.’

Another turn was already on—a lady with an extravagant voice and exuberant carriage whom the house greeted rapturously as a popular serio-comic. Swift, as he hurriedly followed Marlowe’s lead, noted quickly and curiously the details of the environment: the great gaunt stage, of which only a little

piece seemed necessary for the purposes of representation ; the performers who waited dressed and ready for their turn ; the men in evening-dress, friends of the management or of the stars, who talked to the performers and each other ; the little group that clustered at the sides to watch for the fiftieth time a popular turn ; the bewildering lights and shades ; the trained activity of the stage hands ; the rapid movements of the dressing-women ; the muffled forms of the girls who were to go in the series of living pictures, and who sheltered their slightly-clad bodies from the draughts in garments that looked like loose bathing-wrappers.

Any new sights interested Swift, but he had not time for more than the rapidest impression. Marlowe, who knew the whole thing by heart, was already at the farthest corner of the back of the stage, where the Indian was superintending the removal of his two boxes of snakes. Marlowe touched him on the arm, and said, as he turned

round : ‘ Mr. Drass, here is a friend of mine who wants to congratulate you on your performance.’

Mr. Drass fixed his eyes on Swift’s face, and Swift felt again the same sense of fascination that he had experienced before.

‘ Your friend and I are friends already,’ the Indian said in his slow soft voice. ‘ I hope you are well, Mr. Swift.’

He made an Oriental salutation, but Swift put out his hand in the English fashion, and Mr. Drass, after what seemed to Swift like a second of hesitation, did the like, and laid his small brown hand in Swift’s large hand. Swift shook it cordially, as a man should shake the hand of one to whom he owes a service. Mr. Drass accepted the pressure without returning it, and yet his touch convinced Swift that if the fingers that rested so idly in his clasp chose, they could close upon his with a grip that he might not be able to shake off.

‘ Well,’ said Swift cordially, ‘ I am de-

lighted to see you again. I thought that you had vanished for ever.'

Mr. Drass inclined his head gravely.

'You are very good,' he answered, 'to take an interest in the stranger from across the great water. But I knew very well that we should meet again and again, and my heart is not big with joy at the knowledge.'

There was certainly no sound of satisfaction in Mr. Drass's smooth monotonous voice; there was certainly no sign of satisfaction in Mr. Drass's shining snake-like eyes. It was perfectly plain that he was not at all glad to see Swift, and Swift, wondering why, acted, as he usually acted, upon impulse, and asked for a reason.

'How did you know that we should meet again?' Swift said. 'And why should it matter to you one way or another?'

They were standing alone at the moment in that farther corner of the stage. Marlowe had turned aside to talk to the manager,

an elderly gentleman who looked like a Cabinet Minister. There was some kind of little play being played now, and the stage behind the scene was quiet and almost deserted.

The snake-charmer slipped his hand for a moment inside his silken vest, and drew it out again closed closely over some small object. He stretched out his clenched fist towards Swift, and slowly opened it. Swift saw that a small crystal ball lay on the Indian's extended palm.

'I see you there,' Mr. Drass said, 'I see you there dimly, and I know that your presence is not propitious to me. I cannot read very clearly in the crystal since I came to this strange land and these cold skies. But I know that the way I see you is a warning, though I know not of what danger, and I am willing to be warned.'

Swift felt a disposition to smile, but the speaker's face was perfectly grave, and his manner was not the manner of the charlatan,

so Swift restrained his inclination. He said quietly :

‘I do not see why the wizard’s crystal should warn you against me. I do not see how I can cross your path. I am not a member of your profession. I am not a rival snake-charmer.’

‘That is quite true,’ said Mr. Drass. He spoke as calmly as if he were talking over the most ordinary matter, instead of treating of thoughts beyond the reaches of the soul. ‘That is quite true. There is no reason why you should be called upon to interfere with my’—he paused for a moment as if to find the suitable word, and then went on—‘with my business in Europe.’

‘Not the slightest,’ Swift answered, smiling. ‘On the contrary, I should be glad to assist you in any way in my power, as I said before, in return for your kindness to me.’

The Indian looked at the sphere again, and shook his head as he slipped it back again into his vest.

‘I do not think you can help me,’ he said, ‘but I trust that you will not hinder me. I cannot see clearly in the sphere; there is a mist. Will you allow me to look at your hand?’

‘My hand?’ Swift questioned in some surprise, and then, as the snake-charmer nodded, he said, ‘Oh, certainly,’ and held out his right hand. The Indian took it, and looked anxiously at the lines on the palm.

‘Let me see the other hand,’ he said eagerly, and Swift gave him the left hand, which he scanned as carefully. He had a hand of Swift’s in each of his, and his eyes travelled backwards and forwards from one to the other rapidly, as if he were reading in the pages of a book.

‘You are lucky,’ he said, after a pause. ‘You are lucky; you are very lucky.’

‘It is very good of you to say so,’ said Swift, who began to find the situation a little absurd. ‘But I ought to tell you that

I do not believe in the least in this sort of thing.'

The snake-charmer let go Swift's hands, and drew himself up gravely.

'In this instance,' he said quietly, 'what you believe or do not believe is of no moment. It is what I believe that is of importance to me, and I believe that your luck is opposed to mine.'

'I'm sure I hope not,' Swift said cordially; 'and I am sure that I should be sorry in any way to offend against your beliefs. There may be more things between heaven and earth——'

"Than are dreamt of in your philosophy," Mr. Drass went on quietly, completing the quotation. Then, seeing the look of surprise on Swift's face, he added:

'Does it surprise you that the poor snake-charmer should know "Hamlet"? But I learned English at the college at Madras, and I got a prize for English literature. I owe much to the English Raj.'

‘You certainly speak English very well,’ Swift said. He thought that Mr. Drass was a very curious person, with his snakes and his sorceries, and his prize for English literature.

‘It is good for the slave that he speak the tongue of his master,’ the Indian said softly to himself. Then, in a louder tone, he added : ‘It would be bad for me in my business if I did not speak English. And now, with your permission, I will wish you good-night.’

‘Good-night,’ said Swift. He held out his hand again, and the man took it for a moment, and quickly released it. ‘You are sure that I cannot be of any service to you?’

‘Quite sure,’ said Mr. Drass decisively.

He turned away and disappeared just as Marlowe, who had finished his conversation with the manager, came up and joined Swift.

‘Well,’ said Marlowe, ‘how did you like your Indian Johnny?’

‘He is very curious,’ Swift said, more to himself than to his companion.

‘Yes,’ said Marlowe, ‘he is a queer old bird. Well, will you come back to the front again? Totty Crumpet’s turn is coming on, and I don’t want to miss it.’

But Swift had no desire to hear Totty Crumpet, and he said so with his habitual straightforwardness, while Marlowe eyed him with disdain. But the disdain was tempered with pity, and Marlowe conducted Swift to the stage-door as a quicker means of getting out than by returning to the front of the house. Under its flaring gas-lamp Swift thanked Marlowe for his friendly offices, and Marlowe wished him good-night and they parted, Marlowe returning to applaud Miss Crumpet and to meditate upon a new poem for his coming volume, ‘Variety Verses,’ and Swift speeding to Queen Square with his mind as usual occupied with Candida and his heart rejoicing at the thought of seeing her next day.

Swift found little to envy in the life of Theocritus Marlowe, but he did feel inclined

to envy him that facility in the framing of verses which enabled him to make his homages wear pretty shapes like well-placed posies of flowers. He would have liked to write rhymes to Candida, but the game was not for him, and so he contented himself in that spring night by repeating to himself all the fairest lines he could remember from a book that contains such a wonder of sweet words, the Sonnets of Shakespeare. His talk with Mr. Drass had brought Shakespeare into his mind, and so had led to the Sonnets and their application to love. There was a line he could not remember, do what he would ; so when he got home and lit his gas, he looked for the little volume of the Sonnets where it had lain unheeded on his table for many days.

As he took it up, a bit of paper fell from between its pages. Swift picked it up, and saw that it was the curious fragment which he had found in Richmond Park, and had promised to get deciphered and had for-

gotten all about. He made a resolve to see about it on the morrow, and on that resolve he went to bed and to sleep and to dreams of Candida.

CHAPTER XIX.

LONELY.

Ask of the wind as it wails in the heather,
Ask of the sea-bird that strains to the sea,
Ask of the roses that cluster together,
Where my Aminta is hiding from me.

A Pastoral in Pink.

HE awoke, as he always awoke now, with the thought of her in his mind, and her name was now as always on his lips as he turned to look at her likeness. For she had given him a photograph of herself in the early days of their friendship, and the picture was his idol and he its devotee ; he had made a kind of ritual for it, a ritual which he regularly observed with a kind of pleasure and a kind of pain at his own sentimentality. The

photograph stood in its silver frame on his table all day, the exquisite despot of those volumes of wisdom which now lay figuratively, at least—for Swift's landlady was a tidy woman, and deft with the brush—under the dust of disdain. At night he always carried it reverently into his bedroom, as one might carry some sacred image, and hooked it to a nail in the wall near his bed, so that it might be the first thing he should see on waking. And he was always buying flowers to stand near it in a Chinese jar, and, in fact, behaved about it and towards it after a fashion that would have made Budget burst with laughter and have brought a frown of disapproval to the faces of the majority of the Cordeliers.

Every day as he looked for the first time at Candida's portrait he said to himself with the same rapture, 'I shall see her to-day.' And he had seen her every day through all those divine weeks of spring, and now this morning he repeated the dear familiar phrase,

and while he rejoiced in the immediate past, he looked forward with longing to the immediate future. They had arranged on the previous evening that he was to call for her as usual the next day. If it was fine they would wander afield. In the event, unlikely that year, of its not being fine, they would return for a time to the learned dusk of the British Museum.

Swift was in that happy madness of love when the longest hours with the beloved pass with the speed of smiling seconds, and the shortest absences seem to stretch into measureless æons. So Swift's pulses beat joyously at the thought that the new day would be blessed with the sight and the sound of Candida.

But when he went into his workroom he found some letters on his table, and one of them, as he saw at once, to his great surprise, was from Candida. He knew her handwriting, though she had never written to him before, and the letter was sealed with a

seal that he had given to her—a Greek gem that represented a head of Pallas. He opened it with an apprehension that its contents justified.

‘MY DEAR FRIEND,’ Candida wrote,

‘I shall not be able to see you for a little while. It will, I hope and believe, only be a short while, and, indeed, it grieves me much that there should be even this break in our comradeship. You will hear from me again as soon as it is possible for us to meet. I shall be as glad of the meeting as you, for I hold our friendship dear, and shall miss your companionship. But you will remember that you consented to take me on my own imperious terms, and you must accept my disappearance as unquestioningly as you accepted the other conditions which made our alliance so delightful. I will not ask you not to miss me, for I am vain enough to think that you will miss me, but at least you will not have to miss me for long.

Believe in me and trust me as I believe in you and trust you.' Then, with no further formalities, came her bold signature,
'CANDIDA.'

Swift put the letter down with a groan. In a moment all the merry world was withered with sadness, the sunny day seemed as gray as winter. He had never suffered himself to think during all those enchanted weeks what life would be like without Candida, and now the question was cruelly forced upon him, and he was compelled to learn the answer. What did it all mean? Why was she going away? Where was she going to? Why had she told him so suddenly—taking him at all adventure? Perhaps he might never see her again; she might pass out of his life as strangely as she had passed into it, leaving nothing behind but an exquisite memory and an abiding heartache. It was true that her letter spoke only of a brief absence, but did she really

mean that—could he count upon that? How little, after all, he knew of her! That thought assailed him insistently. He knew as little of where she came from as he now knew of where she had gone to. He had met her by chance, and now chance seemed to carry her away, and all that he knew was the name of a girl who lived by herself and liked to read books and to walk walks, and who was very beautiful and whom he loved. But what she had been in the days before he met her, how she had lived her life, whom she had known, liked, disliked, perhaps loved—all this was as much of a mystery to him as her sudden and fantastic disappearance.

Swift sat for awhile silently, stupidly, like a man nearly stunned. The intensity of his devotion to the beautiful girl was made plainer to him than ever by the pain he now felt. He sat there in an agony of heart-sickness, only able to realize how horribly lonely, how horribly lost, he felt. She had

given a meaning to his life, and now all meaning seemed to be taken out of it. It was in vain that he tried to console himself by dwelling on her promise that the parting should not be for long. He felt too wretched to hope, too wretched to think, too wretched to be conscious of anything except a sense of despair. The passion which he had been compelled to keep to himself, to bind with silence, as the body of the Trusty John in the tale was bound with iron, had forced his fancy to a kind of exaltation in which it was defenceless against fact. He stared with weary eyes at her portrait, and murmured her name again and again. Candida, Candida, Candida! The beautiful face seemed to smile back at him with the girl's enchanting smile, but the sight only made his misery more flagrant, more helpless. To think that he might never see her again, and that he had never told her that he loved her! Why had he not told her, he asked himself angrily, and then his conscience answered the ques-

tion, reminding him of his promise, and appealing to his honour. He took up her letter again and read the words in which she assured him that she believed in him and trusted him. He made a gallant effort to regain his self-possession.

There were two other letters on his table, and he opened them mechanically and read them without interest. The first was from the secretary of the Cordeliers' Club, calling his attention to the fact that he had not attended a single meeting of the committee for some time past, and pointing out that this was an infringement of one of the principal rules of the association. It added that another meeting was to be held on the following day, at which his presence was requested to consider a matter of much importance. The second was a hurried scrawl in Budget's large, loose hand, saying that he wanted to see Swift as soon as possible on urgent business, but not saying what the urgent business was. Swift pushed

both the letters from him with a sigh, and stared at the picture of Candida.

‘Well,’ he said to himself with a dreary effort to be courageous, ‘the world goes on, whatever happens, and if love flies out of the window business walks in at the door. If you go away, my dear’—he was addressing himself to the picture—‘you have, no doubt, the wisest of reasons for what you do, and I must try and make the best of it, and act as you would have me act, and not go on as if the world had come to an end because I shall not see you for a few days. Courage, man, courage! Don’t play the fool! Pull yourself together, and remember that work is the purpose of a man’s life.’

Somewhat cheered by these edifying reflections, although he felt that they sounded a little hollow and unreal, Swift set himself steadily to make the best of the loneliness that had been forced upon him. He turned to some of his long-abandoned volumes, and struggled heroically with the mutilators of

Homer. He worked away doggedly for some time, trying hard to forget the name that was sighing in his ears, trying hard to ignore the ache at his heart. But at last he gave it up as a bad job. What he read wearied him. What he wrote sickened him. He closed his books and put them by. He took up the few pages on which he had tried to write coherent sentences, and slowly and deliberately tore them into little strips and dropped them into the waste-paper basket. Then he flung on his hat and went out into the open air, with the volume of Shakespeare's Sonnets in his pocket, and the mysterious paper inside the volume. Here was a momentary way of killing time which might possibly have some gleam of interest in it. The new Homeric commentators had none. Not, at least, that morning.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. HEMPLETT.

Here is one
That can decipher any kind of speech—
Runes, hieroglyphics, Oghams, cuneiforms,
The symbols of the Aztecs, what you will ;
One that can talk a hundred different tongues,
And read in every language in the world
Not worth the reading. Oh, a marvellous man,
A proper pedant !

The Wish of the World.

THE British Museum attracts scholarship to its vicinity as Rhodian oil attracts rats. Swift had lived so long under its shadow that he knew a good deal about the wise men who came from all parts of the world to live also under its shadow, and to suck more

learning from its fountains. One such wise man he had now in his mind, and he steered for that wise man's dwelling.

On the side of an open doorway in Great Russell Street were several small bell-handles, and by the side of each bell-handle was a strip of brass presenting the name of the person to whom the bell belonged. The door always stood open in the day-time, because its hall conducted directly to the door of the book-shop that occupied the ground-floor of the premises. It was a very learned book-shop—a book-shop that Swift knew well, for it was here that all the most erudite works of German critics were to be found, here that the results of foreign scholarship in all parts of the world were most surely and most easily to be ascertained. The bookseller himself, an ingenious German, lived on the floor over the shop. The second-floor was occupied by a British Museum official. The strip of brass that accompanied the third bell bore the inscription

‘S. Hemplett.’ It was S. Hemplett that Swift had come to see.

Mr. Septidecimus Hemplett was one of the most learned of living linguists. He came of a learned stock, to whose learning he owed the eccentricity of his name. For it had pleased a Hemplett in the latter years of the last century — the very Hemplett whose Latin Grammar enjoyed considerable favour in scholastic circles well on into the present century—to christen his children, of whom he had three, by the Roman numerals. His first boy was Primus Hemplett, his first girl was Prima Hemplett. The excellent grammarian had thought at first of calling her Secunda, but he decided, upon mature reflection, that it would be better to allow the sexes to have independent lines. His third child, a boy, became, duly, Secundus Hemplett. The pedagogic humour established a hereditary custom in the Hemplett family. Those of the Hempletts who married and had issue observed the system

of nomenclature as a tradition, and thus it came to pass that in the last decade of the nineteenth century Mr. Hemplett, the learned linguist, found himself favoured with the sonorous name of Septidecimus. He was the seventeenth male Hemplett since the illustrious author of the Latin Grammar set the joke going, and he was decidedly proud of the fact. Also he was the last of his line, and as he was unmarried, and did not seem to be at all a marrying man, there was every likelihood that the arithmetical jest would come to an end with him.

Mr. Septidecimus Hemplett enjoyed the reputation, in a limited circle of scholars, of being the greatest linguist in the world. He was believed to know all the languages that there were to know, and not merely all the languages, but all the various dialects of each of those languages. His erudition was immense, but then, as he always used to say modestly of himself, since he had done nothing all his life but learn languages, it

would be a strange thing indeed if he had not managed to pick up a word or two while he was about it. It was in the reading of languages that he excelled. He could write them, or most of them, too; but the speaking of languages was not in his way at all, for he seldom or never travelled, and, as he readily admitted, he did not possess at all the courier's gift of speaking glibly a foreign tongue. But for reading them he was unrivalled.

Swift went slowly up the three flights of stairs, and knocked at the door on the third landing. As he did so he thought with a sigh of the stairs he had hoped to climb that day, the stairs that led to Candida.

After a moment he heard the sound of shuffling feet; then the drawing of a latch. The door opened, and Mr. Septidecimus Hemplett stood in the doorway peering at his visitor.

Mr. Septidecimus Hemplett was a tall, thin man, of a somewhat stork-like build,

and with a long, beak-shaped nose that heightened his resemblance to the bird of the North. His dome-like head was largely bald, and long wisps of a dust-coloured hair were brushed up around it to form a thin veil for its bareness. His skin was dry and parchment-coloured; his chin was as peaked as his nose; he was smooth-shaven, and he wore spectacles over his pale blue eyes. His lean, angular body was clothed in a suit of a pale-gray stuff, which looked dusty as he looked dusty. Books were bulging out of the pockets of his coat; he had a book under his arm, and another in his hand. At first he did not seem to recognise Swift.

‘How are you?’ said Swift gloomily, and extended his hand in greeting.

The sound of his voice seemed to quicken the scholar’s consciousness. His lank face animated into a smile; his pale eyes gleamed with recognition.

‘My dear Mr. Swift,’ he said, ‘is it you? I am delighted to see you. Pray walk in.’

And, retiring from the doorway, he ushered Swift into his apartment with an awkward but affable wave of his bony hand. Swift accepted the invitation, and preceded the scholar into his familiar study.

There never was such a room for books. The place overflowed with them. The whole of the walls from floor to ceiling were covered with bookshelves. Even the space between and around the two windows that looked out into Great Russell Street, even the space above and around the fireplace, were all shelved off; and every shelf in the place was not merely filled, but loaded with books. On the heads of the decorous ranks of books that had taken up their natural position on the shelves their owner had piled other books, filling up in this way the space left between their tops and the bottom of the shelf immediately above them. Books bulged from the choking shelves, books lay in little mountains upon the floor, books were stacked in heaps in all the corners,

books littered every available chair. The place was a kind of delirious dream of books. Swift, who knew the room well, was familiar with greater places that held vaster quantities of books, but he knew of no other small room, no other one man's den, which was so gorged and glutted with volumes.

And all these books were books upon languages. There were grammars, dictionaries, vocabularies, studies, histories of every language spoken by man upon the face of the earth, of every language that has ever been spoken by man since he first framed his crude ideas in almost formless sound. Here were treatises on Egyptian hieroglyphics cheek by jowl with pamphlets upon the Chinook jargon; speculations upon early Etruscan lay side by side with volumes on Pigeon English and the tongue of the gipsies. A volume on French theatrical slang rested in whimsical companionship with a dictionary of the speech of the Sioux Red Indians.

‘Pray be seated,’ said Mr. Hemplett affably, with a wave of his long hand.

Swift could not help smiling, for all his gloom, as he looked around him, knowing as he did, from former experiences of that cave of wisdom, that every chair would be converted into a camel carrying his own pack across the desert of difficult languages. It was as he expected. Selecting the chair that appeared to bear the lightest load, he lifted from it some pamphlets on cuneiform inscriptions, a Basque dictionary, and a grammar of the Mandarin dialect of Chinese, which he added with careful balancement to the pile that already seemed to totter on another chair. Then he sat down and smiled cheerfully at his host.

‘Will you excuse me for one moment?’ Mr. Hemplett said apologetically. ‘I just want to finish this page of notes on some resemblances that I am tracing between the Icelandic of the days of Erik the Red and the remains of the aboriginal languages of

the New England tribes. I have a line of argument to conclude, and it is of great importance.'

Swift nodded assent, and Mr. Hemplett plunged his adust face into the books and papers on his table, while Swift allowed his gaze to wander from the books on the chairs and the books on the ground to the books on the groaning shelves all around him.

'Was there ever such a library before since the world began?' he asked himself as he surveyed the hundreds, the thousands of books that were massed together, and that all bore only on the one topic of the tongues that men speak, or the tongues that men have spoken, or the tongues that man yet shall speak. For there were not a few volumes in Mr. Hemplett's library which dealt with ideal languages, with Volapuk and the made-up languages that rivalled Volapuk, not a few volumes devoted to speculations on the evolution of the speech

of humanity. Indeed, it was reported amongst the learned in such lore, that Mr. Hemplett occupied his moments of leisure in putting together the materials for a great work upon the language of the future, a subject for which his extraordinary knowledge would seem, indeed, to equip him with authority.

It seemed to the poet in Swift to be a somewhat arid library, and a somewhat arid life that it overshadowed. Among all those masses of volumes, if his glance occasionally discovered the book of some poet, the book of some writer of living prose, he knew very well that it was not there for its own sake, but solely because of the assistance it might render to the settlement of some linguistic problem. Homer only interested Mr. Hemplett because he was written in Ionic Greek, and he only read the *Pentamerone* because it was composed in Neapolitan.

Presently Mr. Hemplett raised his head, pushed his papers from him, closed a big

book with a sigh of satisfaction, and turned his spectacles upon Swift.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘what can I do for you, my young friend?’

Swift took the paper out of his pocket. ‘I wanted to ask you,’ he said, ‘if you would be kind enough to tell me what is written on this paper. It came by chance into my possession, and I must confess to being curious to know its meaning. It seems to me to be Oriental, and I know nothing of Eastern languages. But I felt sure that you would be able to pluck out the heart of its mystery for me. Do you not know all languages?’

Mr. Hemplett shook his head. ‘I wish I did,’ he said, ‘I wish I did. But let me see your paper. Perhaps I may be able to read it.’

Swift got up and handed the paper to him.

Mr. Hemplett took the paper, unfolded it, and glanced at it through his carefully adjusted spectacles.

‘There is certainly no great difficulty about this,’ he said. ‘It is printed in Hindostani, and though the type is cramped and bad, there need be no delay in deciphering it.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Swift, trying to assume an interest he did not feel. ‘Well, what is it all about?’

Mr. Hemplett, who had lifted his eyes from the paper as soon as he had ascertained the language it was couched in, smiled at Swift’s impatience amiably, and returned to his study of the document. In a second or two Swift saw him give a little start of surprise.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Hemplett, ‘this is curious, this is interesting—very curious and interesting indeed.’

‘What is it?’ said Swift languidly; but for another few seconds Mr. Hemplett read on without answering him. Then the linguist again lifted his spectacled face and looked at Swift.

‘This paper,’ he said, ‘is, or purports to be, a copy of a very extraordinary appeal made by an Indian soldier who was executed for murder during the Mutiny.’

‘An appeal?’ said Swift. ‘What sort of appeal—an appeal for mercy?’

Mr. Hemplett shook his head.

‘An appeal for vengeance,’ he said gravely.

‘An appeal for vengeance!’ Swift echoed in surprise.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Hemplett; ‘it is, as it were, a kind of voice from the grave calling for vengeance. This is what it says.’

And Hemplett began to read in his slow, monotonous voice the words of the paper, words that appeared all the grimmer from the quiet, colourless way in which the reader read them.

‘This is the imprecation cried out to Heaven by Ram Hassan Ali, Duffadar of the Second Regiment of Light Cavalry, who was executed at the slaughter-house in Cawnpore

on July 24, 1857, for the killing of infidel women and children.

‘ O Mahommed, only Prophet of the only God, the merciful, the compassionate, vouchsafe in thy clemency and thy pity to receive into Paradise the soul of thy slave whose tongue has been defiled by licking of infidel blood from the floor of the slaughter-house, whose body, defiled by the blows of the infidel, is shortly to be blown from a gun. O Mahommed, only Prophet of the only God, in the days yet to be, inspire my son, Rassan Ali, who is now an infant at Meerut, with the spirit of vengeance that he may revenge his father’s death upon his murderer, and the children of his murderer, until blood has atoned for blood. And I, now at the door of death, bequeath my blessing to my son if he obey my prayer, and my curse here and hereafter if he disobey me. And the name of my murderer is the commander of my regiment.’

Mr. Hemplett came to a stop, and looked

meditatively at Swift, who had listened to the reading with much wonder.

‘Is that all?’ Swift asked.

Mr. Hemplett nodded his head.

‘That is all,’ he answered. ‘What more do you want?’

‘I certainly don’t understand it,’ said Swift. ‘It seems to me a very incoherent document.’

‘No,’ said Mr. Hemplett; ‘I don’t think it is that. I understand it very well, but then’—he added this apologetically, as if to avoid hurting Swift’s feelings—‘you see, I am familiar with Eastern documents. I see the whole thing plainly enough. This man, who was about to be executed, no doubt called out this message to the crowd. It was, no doubt, written down by some pious fakir who would conceive it to be his duty to carry it to the son. It was probably printed and distributed through all the bazaars. It may have reached the son, or it may not.’

‘I wonder,’ said Swift, ‘how one could

find out what was the name of the officer in command at the time, to whom the denunciation refers.'

'That ought not to be difficult,' said Mr. Hemplett. 'You would find the name, no doubt, in any history of the Mutiny, if the man happened to be prominent, or, in any case, you could find it out in the volume of the Army List for that year.'

'I suppose,' said Swift dubiously, as he looked around him at the loaded shelves, 'you don't happen to possess the Army List for that particular year.'

Mr. Hemplett shook his head and smiled.

'No,' he answered; 'that would not be much in my line. But you will find a set, of course, in the British Museum.'

'Of course I shall,' said Swift. 'Thank you very much for your kindness. I will go over to the Reading-room at once.'

'There is very little to thank me for,' said Mr. Hemplett. 'Hindostani is a very easy tongue. It is I who have to thank you for a

pleasant interlude in my work. You have not been to see me for a long time. I was beginning to wonder what had become of you.'

Swift felt that he was blushing under the kindly gaze of Mr. Hemplett's spectacles. It was quite true that he had not been near the old scholar, that he had not been near any of his old friends, for quite a long time. The companionship of Candida had made him indifferent to and forgetful of all other companionship. Now he felt that the blush on his cheeks deepened while he stammered out something about having been exceedingly busy, while all the while his guilty conscience reminded him of the shut books, the dusty papers, the neglected task on his table at home.

Perhaps Mr. Hemplett's studies had not altogether dried the sap of humanity in his withered body. Perhaps he noted the flush on Swift's face, and perhaps he understood it aright. For he smiled a little as he said :

‘Well, well ! young men must be busy as well as old ones.’ Then he added somewhat irrelevantly : ‘I was young myself once.’

And as he spoke he looked away from Swift, and around him on the crowded shelves, and heaved a little sigh that was only slightly melancholy, and that was not at all bitter. If Mr. Hemplett wished for a moment to be young again, he did not at all regret the course that his life had taken, and the glance that beamed upon the books through his big spectacles was a glance of affection.

Swift noted the glance and understood it, and it set him thinking, wondering if in later days he should find as much content in the companionship of books as Mr. Hemplett seemed to find. Only a few short weeks ago he should have answered ‘Yes’ without the slightest hesitation. As far as he had permitted himself to plan out a future, he had always pictured himself as working at his favourite work, acquiring a little more know-

ledge, a little more credit for his knowledge, a little more reward for his knowledge, and growing wiser in growing older, content with his lot. But now a woman's face had shone upon his life, and by that light he seemed to read its meaning quite differently, and to be stirred by all manner of hopes and fears, agitations and desires, which had left him unvexed before. He had thought that it was the best thing in the world to be a scholar ; now he was learning that it was the best thing in the world to be a lover, and the worst thing in the world to be away from the beloved.

He had always liked Mr. Hemplett, but he now felt a sudden sense of affection for the old scholar, an affection inspired partly and principally by the contrast between the romantic colours in which his own life was now painted and the neutral gray of Mr. Hemplett's bookish existence. So it was with a kind of tenderness that he took the linguist's hand, and it seemed to him that it

was with a kind of tenderness that Mr. Hemplett returned the grasp. The scholar and the student, the master and the pupil, ceased for a moment to be scholars, and were content to be men. The one rich with a passionate present, the other rich, perhaps, with some golden memory that glowed, pure ore, out of the shadows of the past, stood for a moment with clasped hands linked by a subtle sympathy. In another moment the link was broken, the hands unclasped ; Mr. Hemplett dropped back into his books again, and Swift went slowly down the stairs, trying to keep his mind interested in the contents of the piece of paper.

He resolved at once to visit the British Museum. He hurried across the street and across the great courtyard. He had not been to the Reading-room for many a day, for, even before he met Candida, he much preferred, whenever he could, to work at home in his own quiet room instead of adding another unit to the toilers in that human

hive. Luckily for him, his work was chiefly of a kind that could be as well despatched in his own study as elsewhere, and so his visits to the great storehouse of books were comparatively few, and were almost invariably brief, rapid visits for the consultation of some rare Greek book or some colossal treatise upon ancient art or archæology.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMING MAN.

It is a great art to make the mind up wisely and well. It is even something, at a pinch, to make it up unwisely and ill. At least the mind is made up. Some people never make up their minds at all, all through life, but seem to pause, perpetually irresolute, on the brink of possibility.

The Letters of Pertinax.

SWIFT's sense of loneliness deepened as he crossed the courtyard of the Museum and noted the flying pigeons. For the place and time recalled irresistibly the dear companionship that he missed, and the day when that companionship first began. The British Museum, which had for so long seemed the shrine of romance, now loomed upon his fancy as a temple dedicated to melancholy. Swift

was furious with himself for feeling his loneliness so much, for making so poor a fight against the strokes of disappointment. He felt that his weakness was unworthy of a Cordelier, unworthy of the author of the 'Cry for Liberty,' but he yielded to the weakness none the less, and his spirit sighed for Candida. Where was she now? he wondered, and immediately after he chid himself for vain speculations, and reminded himself with some acerbity that his immediate business was to consult an old volume of the Army List, and that the sooner he despatched that business the better.

But it was fated that he was not to consult the Army List that day. For at the top of the steps, just as he was going in, he ran against Windover, who was just coming out. Windover greeted him with an enthusiasm which Swift perceived to have a quality of subdued excitement in it unusual to Windover—an enthusiasm which made him feel slightly ashamed as he reflected

upon his neglect, both physical and mental, of his dear friends through all those late enchanted weeks.

Windover caught Swift eagerly by the arm.

‘I am so glad to have met you. I thought there might be a chance of finding you in the Museum, where I had to go to look up some facts for a paper that I wanted to finish before—— Well, I will tell you before what if you can spare the time to walk part of the way with me.’

Swift was really glad to see Windover, and the Army List could keep. He saw by his friend’s manner that there was something which he wished to talk about, and even if Swift’s errand to the Museum had been more important than it was, he would have given it the go-by to make amends, to salve in some degree his own conscience, sore at his neglect of the Windovers. So he assured his friend that his business in the Museum was not in the least pressing, and,

turning round, he walked by Windover's side down the steps and across the courtyard back into Great Russell Street.

The first few seconds of their conversation Windover devoted to playfully upbraiding Swift for having left him and Lucilla in the cold for so long.

‘What has become of you? Where have you been?’ he asked. ‘I began to fear that you had emigrated or married, or perhaps both. Now I perceive that you have not emigrated. Is it by chance the other trifle, actually or potentially?’

Swift felt his cheeks grow hotter, but he laughed an assertive denial.

‘No, no, nothing of the kind! I have no wish to bid my native land good-night—at least, for the present; and as for the other, why, my life so far resembles heaven that there is no marrying or giving in marriage in it.’

‘Then, what have you been doing to treat us so shamefully?’ Windover persevered.

Swift murmured a stumbling explanation about being very busy, translating an especially important and unusually difficult book that took up all his time and absorbed all his attention. The sense that he was not speaking truth stung him sharply till he reflected that, after all, a human life was by a figure of speech a book, and that he had been occupied entirely with a human life of late, and had been overpoweringly interested in the attempt to translate it. Thus he solaced himself internally. Externally he reminded Windover, by way of turning the conversation, that there was something he promised to tell him.

Windover seemed pleased that Swift had by his reminder allowed him to turn to that topic without appearing unduly eager to push his own affairs.

‘It’s rather curious,’ he said, ‘and I know you will be surprised ; but the fact is that I have definitely decided to go into Parliament—at least, I am going to try,’ he added,

as a deferential protest to the Fates against Rockielaw's certainty.

Swift stared at him in considerable surprise. He had forgotten all about the offer that had been made to Windover. It was curious to think of him as coming forward, with his cool air of agreeable scholarship, into the heat and the dust of political life. That Windover should direct the course of Ministers in a column of prose as elegant as Bolingbroke's, that he should reprimand revolution with austere grace in learned periodicals, was fitting, was natural, was even inevitable. But that he should leave his desk and his books and his green garden and his pretty wife, to fling himself into the scrimmage, seemed to Swift scarcely less astounding than it would be to see him suddenly pluck off his high hat and his neatly-built frock-coat and jerk himself joyously into a row at a street corner. He looked carefully at his companion's face to see if he could read there any lurking

humour, any half-hidden hint that Windover was pleased to be merry. But he saw no such signs there, and Windover, who seemed to guess what he was looking for, burst out laughing.

‘You are surprised,’ he said—‘very much surprised. Confess it. I knew you would be; so did Lucilla.’

‘Well,’ said Swift slowly, ‘I certainly am surprised. It seems a little sudden, coming on one in this unexpected way.’

‘It would not have come upon you in this unexpected way,’ Windover retorted, ‘if your friends had been fortunate enough to see anything of you for the last six weeks. At least, I could have told you that I was gradually making up my mind to accept, if the business ever took a definite shape. The business has now taken a definite shape. The other fellow has formally applied for the Chiltern Hundreds.’

‘Well,’ said Swift, ‘I am sure I hope you will like it!’ He meant his tone to be

hearty, but it only succeeded in being half-hearted.

Windover's quick ear caught the dubiousness in the wish.

'Oh, of course it's a toss-up!' he admitted. 'I don't wish to pose as the Noble Roman, and that sort of thing; but, to be honest with you, I should not dream of coming forward if it had not been made very plain to me that it was in a great degree my duty to do so.'

'I am sure of that!' Swift assented. And he was quite sure, for he knew Windover well enough to know that his honesty had no flaw in it.

'Of course, I know very well,' Windover went on, 'that my view of things is not your view of things. You are a Rad, and a Red, and all the rest of it, and you call me a reactionary, and I am quite content to accept the title. But if I do get into that blessed place'—he gave a jerk of his head to suggest the direction of Westminster—'and as far as one can see it seems pretty certain that I

shall get in, you may be sure that I shall try and do my best for the country, and not merely what is best for my party.'

'You are quite right; I wonder if you will be able to!' Swift said. He had a vague appreciation of the influence of party, and so had Windover, only more definitely, for he added:

'Well, I shall do my best, and I won't make any rash promises.'

There was a moment's silence between the two men, as they walked slowly along Gower Street. For a moment it came into Windover's mind to tell Swift of Budget's extraordinary overture to Rockielaw. But he immediately put the idea aside. Budget was a friend of Swift's as well as of himself, and, after all, it was no part of one friend's duty to speak of another friend's disloyalty to a third. It would be ungenerous to tell tales, Windover reflected. After all, Budget may not have appreciated the indecency of his action, and even if he did, nothing

would be gained by betraying his conduct to Swift. So Windover held his peace on the subject; it did not occur to him as possible that anything in Swift's life could depend at all upon whether he spoke out or kept silence about Budget that afternoon.

Swift broke the brief silence with a question.

'Where are you going to stand for?' he asked. 'Tell us how, and all about it.'

Windover proceeded to satisfy Swift's curiosity by a rapid account of his and Lucilla's weighty deliberations; of their final decision to accept a proposal which had come in the first place from Miss Dorothy Carteret.

'Miss Dorothy Carteret?' Swift queried. The name vaguely suggested some associations to him. He dimly recollected some remarks of Budget's at Windover's table.

Windover explained again, amiably and exhaustively. He told Swift of the Sylphs, that curious evanescent, incoherent, im-

palpable body, with its strange schemes, and of the High-Priestess of the Sylphs, the young lady who seemed to have taken it into her pretty head that she was to regenerate England—Miss Dorothy Carteret, Lord Godolphin's eccentric daughter.

‘I have not seen Miss Carteret yet,’ Windover said. ‘She has been out of town, but she is coming back for the election, and Rockielaw thinks that her presence at Pine Hill is enough to settle the matter. But I don't expect that there will be any contest. The place has been consistently one colour for generations.’

‘And that colour is Heaven's own blessed blue,’ said Swift with a smile, and Windover answered him, smiling :

‘Yes, indeed ; and blue is a brave colour, my dear fellow, and pleases my fancy better than scarlet. I am afraid your friends wouldn't find much sympathy at Bullford !’

‘When do you begin ?’ Swift asked. He

was so much interested at the idea of Windover's election that he almost forgot for the moment how miserable he was.

'I am going down almost immediately,' Windover answered; 'I and Lucilla—Lucilla goes, of course. Rockielaw says that Lucilla would make a splendid canvasser. We are all going to stop with Sir Charles Amber at The Towers. The Ambers have been Miss Carteret's closest friends since her mother died. They are, I believe, delightful people.'

'Do you know,' said Swift, 'I have it in my heart to wish that I could turn Conservative for a fortnight, that I might go down to Bullford with you, and help you to carry Pine Hill. I should love to see Lucilla canvassing, and to hear you thunder from political platforms.'

'I wish you could, with all my heart,' Windover said; 'but I am afraid you are incorrigible. Still, there is one thing you can do for me.'

‘What is that?’ asked Swift.

‘You can come on to luncheon with me now. I will not ask you to drink success to my adventure, but we can at least pledge a persistent friendship. Besides, you owe Lucilla an apology for having neglected her all this great while. So! Will you come?’

‘With all my heart,’ Swift answered. He felt that it would be better for him than moping alone and moodily longing for the lost Candida. So the two friends walked across the Park, and discussed the political life in the abstract, away from party questions, and Swift agreed with Windover that it was a man’s life, after all. His interest in the subject, and in any subject, was listless just then. He was in that dejected phase of the sentimental life when to love seems the only business, and the beloved the only woman, and when love’s aches seem mortal and love’s anxieties endless.

‘Yes,’ Windover said, unaware of his com-

panion's indifference, 'it is a man's life, of a sort. A real man ought to be a soldier or a sailor, or an explorer or a gipsy, to be an active, mobile, adventurous creature, not a sluggard who stoops over a desk or squats behind a counter. But if a poor devil of a man of letters can be none of these things, he may find a kind of substitute in the political hurly-burly, and give and take some lusty strokes, and learn the joy of eventful living, and, who knows? prove in the end not wholly unserviceable to his mother, the country. Yes, yes, let us assure ourselves that it is a man's life, after all.'

They were skirting Primrose Hill as Windover was uttering these profound reflections, and while Swift smiled a wistful agreement, his glance travelled along the green shoulder that sloped to the summer sky, and his mind renewed his adventure. Would he ever, he wondered, learn the name of his rubicund assailant, or the cause of the assault? Was

it possible that the man was some friend of Candida's, who had recognised the token? He wished that he had been able to ask Candida that, to ask Candida other questions. Now he might never see Candida again to ask her any questions, to ask her the question. He sighed wearily, and Windover, noting the sigh, mistook it.

'Come,' he said, 'you live a man's life in your way, with your "Cry for Liberty," and your Cordeliers, and all the rest of it.'

To which Swift, disagreeing, agreed.

When they got to the house, Lucilla welcomed Swift warmly, and upbraided him with gracious severity for having dared to neglect them for such a waste of weeks, and made all sorts of sharp thrusts at the cause, which Swift parried as well as he could. The daintiness of Lucilla was a delight to Swift in his vexed, lonely temper, and he could have found it in his heart to tell her all about his trouble, and perhaps he might if he had been alone with her. But Anthony

was there, and Anthony's mind not unnaturally ran on the election, and Lucilla's mind kept him company, and so Swift held his tongue as to his secret.

CHAPTER XXII.

VOX POPULI.

When the bonds of the earth are broken,
When the fools of the time are free,
When the last of the lies is spoken,
The first of the truths awoken,
When life shall begin to be ;
Then sorrow and sin and sadness
Shall turn to delight and gladness,
And life be no longer madness,
But love of the trinity,
Liberty,
Equality,
Fraternity.

Idylls of Insurrection.

THE Cordeliers' Club exerted some influence, and believed that it exerted an enormous influence, upon the political thought and the political action of its time. The extremely

advanced nature of its opinions won for it the adhesion of all manner of wild, generous and impetuous spirits, and when spirits are wild, generous and impetuous, they must and will count as erratic factors in the great game of how things are not to be done. But it did not depend for its existence merely upon the irresponsible or the irreconcilable; it commanded solid men, earnest men, active men. And Budget, who was adored by the irresponsible for his glittering phrases and his resonant republicanism, had managed also to captivate the minds of the graver spirits, and to convince them of two things. The first thing was, that it was high time that the Cordeliers' Club, which was beginning to establish affiliated bodies in all the great provincial towns, and even in many of the small ones, should have its own representative in Parliament. The second thing was that the best possible man to be chosen as the mouthpiece of the Cordeliers was Stephen Budget himself. So when Swift

entered the committee-room of the Cordeliers that night, some surprises awaited him.

He had called for Budget in the afternoon, and had failed to find him at home. He had dined dismally enough at a place he used to haunt in the days before he knew Candida, and when his melancholy meal had ended, he had made his way due east to St. Ethelfreda's Without. The moment he entered the committee-room of the club, he was convinced that matter of importance was toward. He was a little late, only a few minutes, but the Cordeliers, most of whom lived in the neighbourhood, were habitually punctual, and the room was full when Swift made his appearance. He was greeted with a round of slightly ironical applause as he made his way to a vacant seat at the end of the long table directly facing a bust of Robespierre, which seemed to smile a thin-lipped smile of derisive welcome at him. Budget was sitting next to the chairman, with an air of satisfaction

and importance upon his face, and the secretary of the club had just finished reading something aloud at the moment when Swift came into the room.

As soon as he had finished, the chairman addressed Swift, and put him in possession of the business they were discussing. In half a dozen clear, straightforward sentences he managed to surprise Swift as much as Swift had ever been surprised in his life. The committee of the Cordeliers had decided that it was for the interest of the cause and of the club that they should seek to make their influence felt at every election. There was an election just about to take place, the election for the Pine Hill Division of Surrey, left vacant by the sitting member's application for the Chiltern Hundreds. The Cordeliers had resolved to contest the seat, not so much with any great confidence of winning it, though they were by no means without hope, as at once to assert themselves as a serious factor in active political life.

The man whom they had unanimously resolved to select as their representative was Stephen Budget.

Here Stephen Budget drummed upon the table with his big fingers, and affected an air of statesmanlike modesty. Swift stared at the chairman in amazement, but he was destined to be yet more amazed. For the chairman went on to say that after due deliberation the committee had resolved to send with Budget, as his lieutenant in what must prove a memorable campaign, one of the ablest, the most illustrious, of their members, one who had endeared himself to advanced thought all over the country, one whose name was dear to every Cordelier in the kingdom, the eminent author of the 'Cry for Liberty,' Brander Swift.

A storm of applause greeted the conclusion of the chairman's words. As he sat down Swift leaped to his feet amidst renewed and more vehement cheering. It was evident that Swift's long absence from their delibera-

tions had not diminished his popularity with the leading spirits of the Cordeliers, and it was with something as nearly approaching to a thrill of pleasure as he had experienced that day that Swift listened to the applause, and waited until it had died away into silence. But what he had to say was not of a nature to rekindle applause in the committee-room of the Cordeliers' Club. Swift was generally a ready and an easy speaker ; he was always classed among the orators of whom the Cordeliers were most proud, and he was always listened to with enthusiasm, and interrupted by approval. But now he was unready, embarrassed, apologetic, full of protestations, and his apologies and his protestations were made to listeners who grew more and more unfavourable as Swift went on.

Swift's purpose was to decline the mission that had been so unexpectedly put upon him, and as the Cordeliers regarded the offer as an honour and as a signal proof of their

forgiveness of Swift's late indifference to his political duties, they were moved to an early resentment of his attitude. But their resentment increased when Swift went on to explain the reason for his unwillingness to accept the unexpected honour. This was, forsooth, that the candidate whom the Cordeliers were about to oppose, the reactionary, the champion of aristocracy, was a personal friend of Swift's against whom Swift would find it painful, if not impossible, to work. For the first time in the history of the club words spoken by the author of 'A Cry for Liberty' were received with sounds of angry disapproval. Swift sat down, pale and excited, with very distasteful cries ringing in his ears. The smile on the bust of Robespierre seemed, as he glanced up at it, to be more derisive than ever.

Several members of the committee rose to their feet in angry reprobation of what they regarded as Swift's treason to the principles of the organization. But while each of

Swift's accusers was appealing vociferously to the chairman for audience, Budget upreared his massive form from the table, and made it plain that he proposed to speak. The sight of his uplifted bulk, the sound of his tremendous voice, as it bellowed through the room a demand which was rather a command for silence, converted the sudden disorder into a no less sudden tranquillity. Everyone present felt that Budget, as the hero of the coming contest, was the man with the most right to speak of any man in the room; everyone felt that no one was better qualified to give Swift his deserts for his perfidy.

Budget began by glancing in dignified silence at the busts of the revolutionary heroes which adorned the walls, as if he offered to each of their memories in turn a mute apology for the backsliding of one who had professed, and professed so ardently, their opinions. Then, turning his gaze full upon Swift, he began by expressing his regret and his surprise at the words which

had just fallen from his friend, and as he spoke the committee supported him with a sullen undertone of applause. But the speaker immediately went on to say that he could not help feeling much sympathy for Swift in the peculiar position in which Swift was placed, a position of whose extreme difficulty he himself was better qualified to judge than any other man there present. For he confessed that he shared with Swift a feeling of personal friendship for the man he was about to oppose, for the Apostle of Reaction, Anthony Windover. At this the members of the committee, to whom the orator had never before mentioned any acquaintanceship with Windover, looked astonished, but Budget, disregarding their astonishment, continued his speech. He, too, had struggled with himself, had communed with his spirit, had wrestled with the angel of human affection like Jacob, and like Jacob had not been overthrown. Biblical allusions of a somewhat obvious kind lent their

perennial charm to all Stephen's discourses, and in this instance, as always, had their stimulative effect. When the prompt applause had faded, Budget asserted that one of the first principles on which an advanced movement such as theirs was based was to ignore all ties, all intimacies, all friendships, for the common good.

'I love Anthony Windover,' he declared with a voice that was shaken as if by well-nigh unconquerable sobs; 'I love Anthony Windover the man, but not Anthony Windover the oppressor, and the more I love the one the more it is my duty, and the duty of every loyal Cordelier, to oppose the other.'

And then, after an eloquent address to the austere Roman virtues, he turned to Swift and appealed to him, in an appeal that had a kind of wild eloquence in it, to play the Roman too, to show his unswerving, unalterable devotion to the cause that he adorned by obeying the behest of the institu-

tion they loved and served, even though that obedience should force him to run counter to a commendable human instinct.

‘Would the soldier on the brink of battle,’ he asked, ‘betray his flag because he knew that in the opposite camp someone very dear to him had taken service?’ And with a last entreaty to Swift to be stanch to the principles of Eighty-Nine and Ninety-Four, Budget sat down, while the committee raved at him in hysterical raptures.

The lead which had been so ingeniously given was promptly followed. Member after member of the committee rose and added the weight of his personal appeal to a trusted and honoured brother not to abandon the cause he served and the theories he illuminated. Every speaker intensified the importance of the occasion, the austere grandeur of the sacrifice, until at last it seemed to the object of all this oratory that no more momentous matter was recorded in the chronicle of the age.

What was Swift to do? Dazed by the whirling words, irritated at the sudden and unwelcome disfavour in which he found himself, bewildered by the importance attached to his action by a body of men in whom he had long believed, Swift saw no other courses open to him but surrender or secession. He had no wish to secede from the Cordeliers; they represented his opinions, they championed his creed; they had often been led by him, and it might well seem stubborn on his part to refuse their lead now in a case where, after all, he felt that they were in the right. If he believed in the principles that he professed, it was plain that he ought not to allow himself to swerve from the course of duty merely because a personal friend stood in the path of progress and sought to bar the way. There was, too, something in all the Roman father business which touched the sentimentalism in Swift and flattered him against his will.

Candida ought to admire him, he thought,

for this splendid sacrifice of friendship upon the altar of patriotism, even if her sense of irony tempted her to smile at the proportions to which the concession sought to inflate itself. So, with the image of Candida in his mind, Swift rose and in a few brief words announced to the committee that he placed himself at their disposition.

The revulsion of feeling was complete. Swift had scarcely finished his sentence of concession before he found that he had not merely conquered his new unpopularity, but regained all, and more than all, his old popularity. The chairman metaphorically wept tears of joy over him ; Budget eulogized him in glowing periods, in which he declared that Swift's earlier hesitation was only one degree less admirable and less honourable than the manner in which he had overcome that hesitation.

‘So long,’ he said, ‘as the Cordeliers boasted the services of such single-minded men, they might proudly assert that all was

well for them and for the country.' And he concluded, as it was common for speakers in that room to conclude their speeches, with an apposite quotation from the 'Cry for Liberty,' which brought the blood to Swift's cheeks, because it reminded him of Candida, who had once cited to him that very sentence and asked him what it meant.

After such an emotional episode, even the austerity of the Cordeliers felt itself unsuited to a struggle with further business. Fortunately, there was little further business to discuss, and so they broke up. Every member of the committee in turn pressed up to Swift before leaving, and wrung his hand, assuring him at the same time, in language of identical fervour and of almost identical phrase, that he had deserved well of the country, and that the Cordeliers were proud of their gifted son. All of which Swift took in good part, with that not unpleasing sense of exaltation which usually accompanies

the reaction of compliment upon condemnation. It was hard indeed not to believe his friends when they assured him that he was indeed a very fine fellow who would have adorned the proudest period of the Revolution.

But that exhilaration of the sense which flattery fans in the impressionable fell away sensibly when the stimulating influence was removed. At Budget's request Swift waited for him, that they might make their way home together. Budget had a few words to say to the chairman; he was one of those politicians who have always a few words to say to somebody after everybody else has gone; and while he whispered with him in a corner, Swift looked round upon the almost deserted room with a revived melancholy. The place looked gaunt and cold, with its whitewashed walls and glaring gaslights. The busts on their brackets—Marat, Robespierre, Danton and St. Just, one for each side of the room—did not seem so inspirit-

ing as he had found them of old time. He thought of Candida, and sighed to himself, and wondered if it was right and wise for a patriot ever to fall in love. He felt unnerved, irresolute, and he shivered as if the world had suddenly grown cold.

He and Budget walked home together all the way from St. Ethelfreda's Without to Bloomsbury. It was a long walk, but it did not seem too long to Swift, who was very willing to kill time, and it did not seem too long to his companion, who talked the whole time about himself, and his prospects and his ambitions. He had no serious expectation of winning the election, but it cost him nothing; the campaign was paid for by those in the background who filled the exchequer of the party. It would put him prominently before the country; it was the first decisive step on the way to Westminster. He decided to go down the next day to the seat of war. Swift promised to follow him in a day or two, pleading that

he had business to look after which must be settled before he left London. On that understanding they parted at the door of Budget's lodging.

Swift did not rejoice at the duty that had been put upon him. It had grown plainer than ever of late to him, under the influence of his romantic passion, that he did not respect Budget, and it was portion and parcel of Swift's theory of life that it was unfitting to like that which one could not respect. Even apart from his theories, however, Swift had felt of late that his lack of respect for his friend was accompanied by an independent lack of liking for him. He did not merely dislike him because he did not respect him: he found that he was growing to dislike him apart from any question of respect. The coarseness of Stephen's view of life disgusted him—a coarseness that not merely saw meanness and baseness in everything, but avowed meanness and baseness itself. He was tired of his eternal

farthing philosophy of the vicious, of his nauseous disbelief in all the qualities of courage, of honour, of truth, of devotion to principle, of loyalty to a cause or a creed which Swift believed to be the impulses of life.

In this scheme of things no man was brave except for his own advantage ; no woman was chaste except through fear or force ; the word of no human creature was worth the air it wasted ; man was dominated by greed, by lust, and by greed and lust alone ; and religion, patriotism, heroism, were but so many battered masks which cunning men put on to entrap the wisest.

Swift guessed, and, indeed, Budget scarcely attempted to conceal, that his extreme views were adopted by him as the best means of advancing his own interests and giving him an opportunity for self-assertion otherwise denied to him. After he left his colleague he felt a strong impulse to write to the Cordeliers and say that, after

all, and in spite of all, he could not go to Pine Hill.

But at the same time he recognised, or thought that he recognised, that he had no right to set his private judgment of a man against the judgment of those whom he considered to be in this regard his chiefs. If it would do any good to the cause for Budget to stand for Pine Hill, then it seemed to Swift that it was his duty to respond with readiness, if not with cheerfulness, to the call made upon him to go to the assistance of the candidate. After all, much of Budget's avowed unscrupulousness might be an affectation; men often loved to be the fanfarons of vices that were not their own, and in any case Stephen was a man of great ability, whose qualities as a free companion had better be enlisted under the banners of progress than allowed to drift into the camp of the reactionaries.

It came to pass, therefore, that Swift, after a wakeful night passed in considera-

tion of the question, decided that he would go to Pine Hill and do the best he could for the Cordeliers' choice, and he prepared reluctantly for his departure. The advantage of contesting the district did not seem so obvious to him as it did to Budget, and not merely to Budget, but to the tireless wire-pullers who approved of the proposed step, and who financed it. He did not think that there would be the least chance of winning the seat, and he could by no means force his mind into the unshakable conviction that if by any strange influence of the unexpected Stephen did get elected, it would prove to be at all a good thing for the party to whose principles Swift was so loyally pledged. But at least it would be a good thing for him to get away from London, and to seek in action some nepenthe for the absence of Candida.

END OF VOL. II.





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